NEA Today
Special Edition
September 1996
Vol. 15, No. 1
Washington, D.C.

Education Support Personnel

Why We're **Proud**

What We **Do**

What We **Want**

What We **Earn**

NEA Support Person of the Year Evelyn Foster

President's Message

One of the great NEA success stories in recent years has been the rapid rise of education support employees as a dynamic, vital constituent group within our Association family.

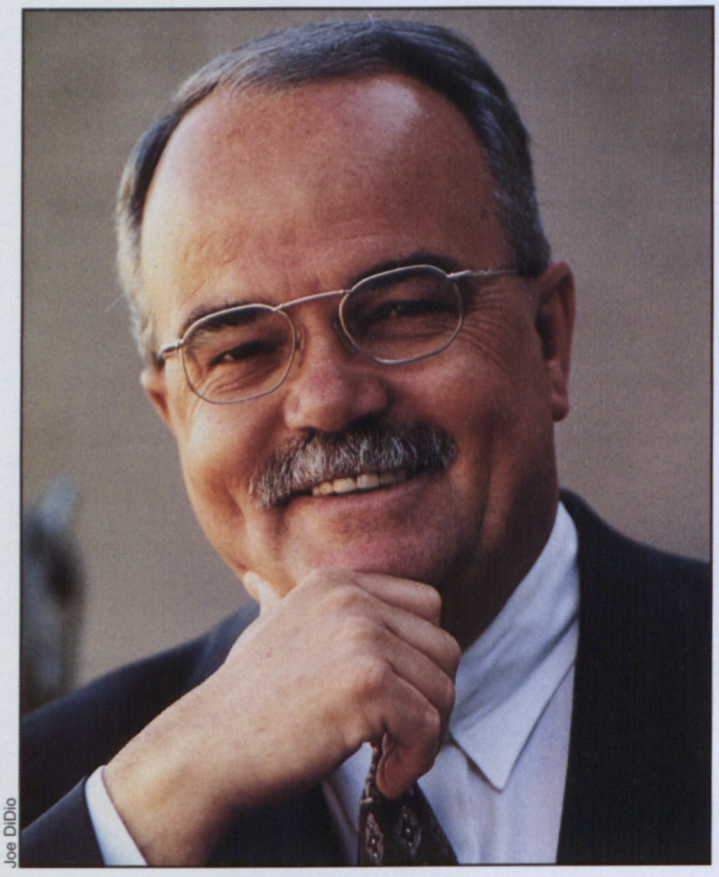
And I'm not just talking about the big increases in support employee membership. More significant, to me, is the fact that ESP members are demanding—and winning—an equal role at all levels of our organization. And they are stepping forward as some of NEA's most outspoken and respected new leaders.

We urgently need this fresh infusion of strength and leadership. Because public education, today, faces very real and very determined adversaries—adversaries who would like nothing more than for public school employees to be divided, bickering among ourselves, not realizing our full potential.

If we are to prevail against those who seek to dismantle public education, we must embrace a vision for our Association that is broad, inclusive, and united.

To that end, we celebrate all the best qualities of our support employee members—qualities that you will see illustrated in this special edition of *NEA Today*.

Turn these pages and you will find stories of men and women just like you—paraprofessionals, bus drivers, custodians, secretaries, food service workers, and more—who contribute vitally to the life of their schools and to the education of America's children.



Joe DiDio

NEA President
Bob Chase

Indeed, within a school, support employees are educators in the broadest and best sense of the word. The difference is that support personnel have to be much more creative and resourceful.

After all, most of you have no textbooks, lesson plans, or chalk boards. Instead, you teach by daily personal example: self-discipline, responsibility, compassion, and the dignity of hard work.

But let's not kid ourselves. As far as you've come in recent years, there is still so far to go—so many battles yet to be won.

You are undervalued by our society. You are underpaid by your school districts. And, too often, you are overlooked by administrators and others within your schools.

In my time as president of NEA, I intend to do everything in my power to address these challenges. Let no one forget that we are not the National Teachers Association. We are the National Education Association.

As educators—whether we are teachers, support staff, or administrators—all of us must remain united in our commitment to children, united in our commitment to public education, and united in our commitment to each other.

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Contents

2 **Why We're Proud**

Need some inspiration? Meet a few dozen of your colleagues who find new ways to stand up for kids every day.

9 **Special Poster Insert**

A colorful, pull-out poster for your wall. Plus, a list of 10 ways you can bring your school and community together.

21 **What We Do**

Education support employees speak out about the role they play in keeping schools running.

31 **What We Want**

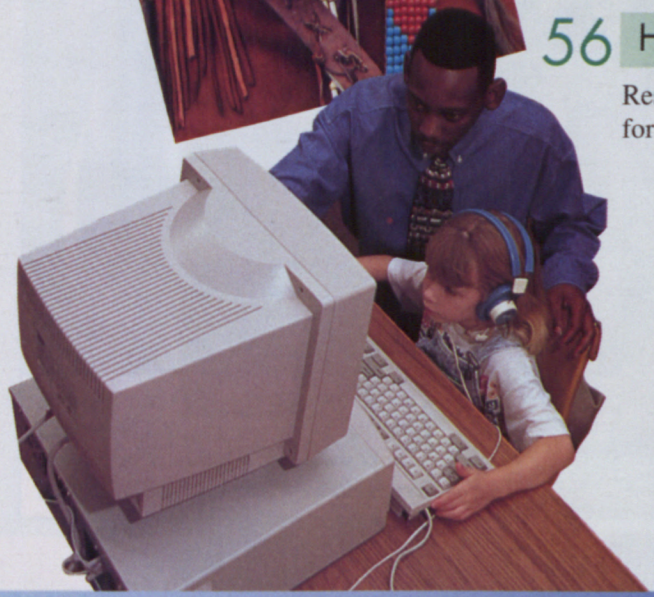
Respect, of course—plus safe schools, job security, and more. A glimpse at how NEA members across the country are working for a better future.

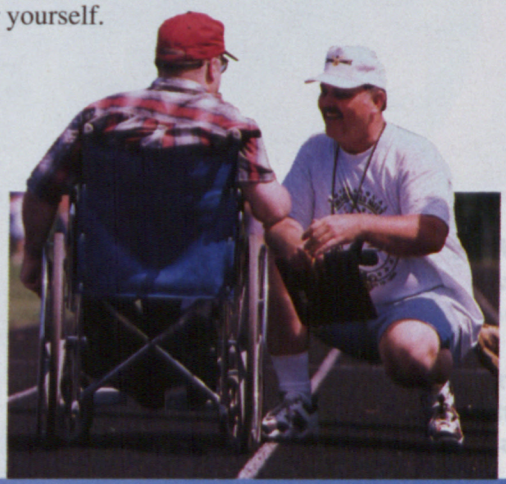
45 **What We Earn**

Not enough! A look at how much NEA members around the nation get paid.

56 **Heads Up!**

Resources from NEA to help you do the best possible job for kids—and for yourself.





Why We're Proud

Arizona bus driver June Johnson delivers kids to school, food to the needy, and toys to young cancer patients. Meet other NEA members with good reason to be proud.

Don Stevenson

IN MISSOURI

Sporting Chance

"People with disabilities can play sports just like anyone else—on their own level and to their best ability."

That's the attitude that led Darrell Long, a building and grounds maintenance worker in Springfield, to become a coach and referee for A Sporting Chance, an organization that gives disabled people a chance to participate in sports.

"A Sporting Chance helps the athletes meet other people and gets them thinking of things besides how bad it is to be disabled," he says. "It motivates them and lets them enjoy life."

Athletes range in age from 5 to 45, comprise 80 different teams, and play everything from soccer to softball. More than 1,000 people participate in basketball alone.

As a volunteer, Long devotes hundreds of hours to coaching, officiating, and fundraising. His 20-year-old son, who is deaf, is his inspiration.

"My reward," says Long, "is seeing the athletes make progress. Their involvement brings joy to them—and that gives me joy, too."

An active member of Springfield ESP, maintenance worker Darrell Long volunteers as a coach for disabled athletes.

Andy Lavalley

IN NORTH CAROLINA

In the Spotlight

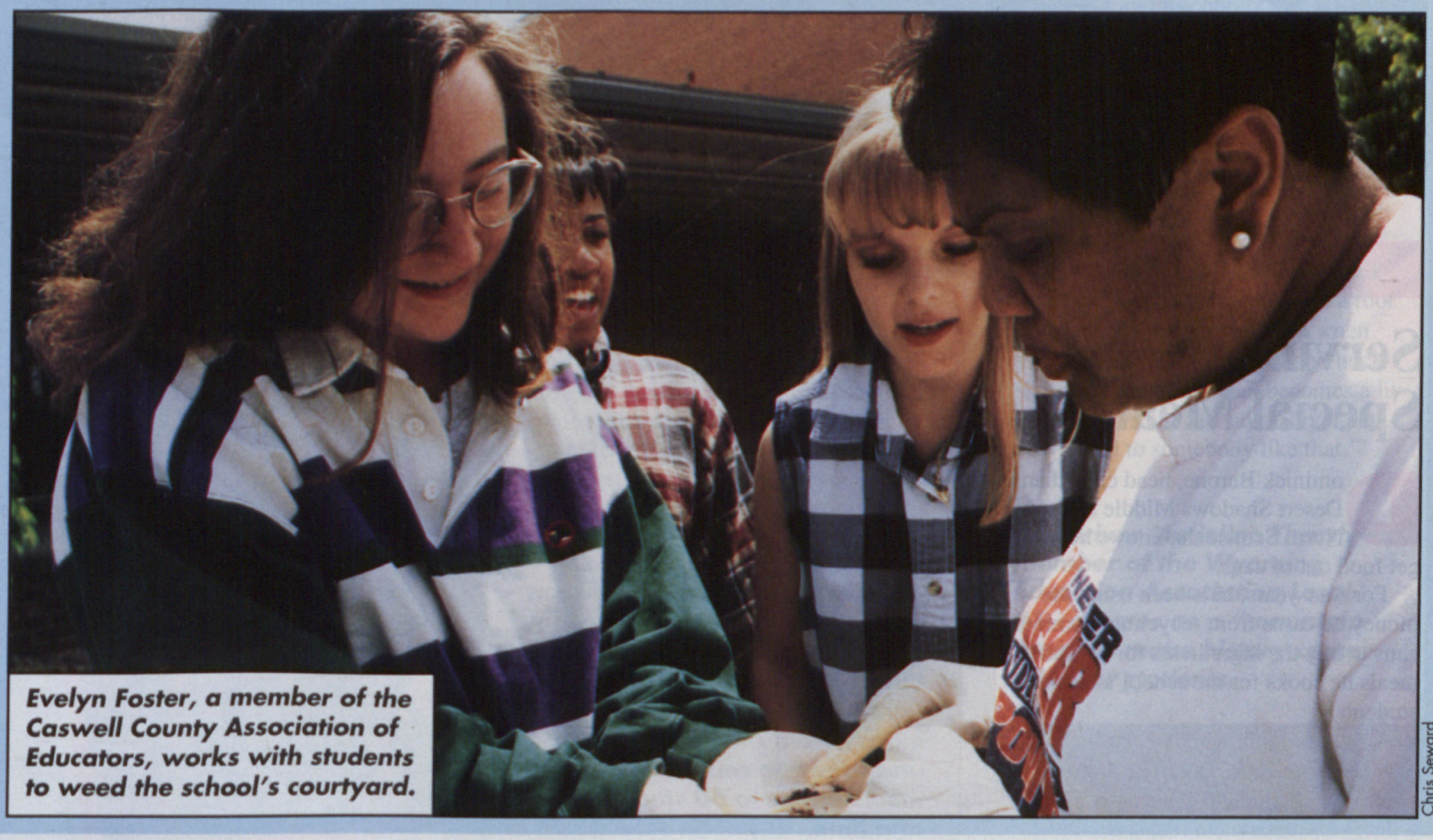
Evelyn Foster's job title is "student service coordinator," but that doesn't begin to tell her story.

Foster is a fixture at Barlett Yancey Senior High School—and has been for 20 years. She helps run the school store, an after-school tutorial program, a course on crime and the community, family nights, a "minister's alliance," a teen gospel choir, and a gardening group.

Foster also coordinates lunches for the scholars and banquets for the athletes. And, three years ago, she started a violence prevention program to educate kids on the consequences of criminal activity.

Foster's well known in Pelham, a small town just south of Danville, Virginia. But this spring her reputation went national when NEA named her its 1996 Support Person of the Year.

Foster was thrilled, but, as she says, "I bubble every day. Working with these kids must be my calling. It makes me feel good and fills me with joy."



Evelyn Foster, a member of the Caswell County Association of Educators, works with students to weed the school's courtyard.

Chris Seward

Why We're Proud

IN VIRGINIA

A Town Is Reborn

More than 40 years ago, Mary Thompson moved to Church Hill, a neighborhood in east Richmond known for its tidy houses, picket fences, and laughing children. She married, had five children, went to work as a secretary for the school system—and watched her small community slowly die.

People began to move to the suburbs, children grew up and moved away, some couldn't afford to keep their homes in good repair. Soon each block had three or four vacant lots, urban blight set in, and safety became an issue.

Motivated by a love of the area, Thompson moved into high gear. She helped establish a civic league—New Visions—which is now working in partnership with the Richmond Better Housing Coalition to rebuild her community.

As New Visions president, Thompson and her neighbors recently held a ribbon-cutting ceremony for two newly constructed houses. Seven homes are almost complete and four more are in the works.

"It's important to me to see this area revitalized," says Thompson, a member of the Richmond City ESP and a school secretary for 31 years. "I knew it when it was a thriving and peaceful community. It brought people together, and we felt safe here.

"We have to have home, school, and the community working together for children to be strong, productive people," Thompson adds. "We all have to take responsibility for the children."

Joe Mahoney

"I want to see the community come alive again," says school secretary and neighborhood activist Mary Thompson. "I try to let people know that this community is on the upswing and has the potential to be great."

IN ARIZONA

Serving Up Special Meals

Dominick Barone, head custodian at Desert Shadows Middle School in North Scottsdale, knows how to get food out of cans.

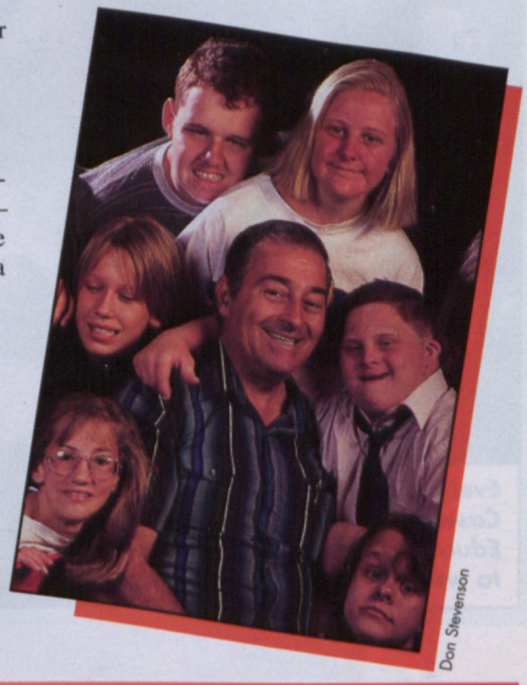
For four years, he's been using the money he earns from recycling aluminum cans to buy the ingredients for special meals he cooks for the school's disabled students.

Whether it's lasagna and garlic bread or omelets and fried potatoes, Barone cooks for the students—as many as 60 at a time—to make them feel special.

"I like to be able to do something for the kids," he says. "It makes them so happy."

Barone, who's been recycling for 20 years, picks up cans seven days a week around the school grounds and in a nearby park. An average week's collection—between 100 and 200 cans—nets Barone about $30. Over time, that money buys a lot of groceries.

"I make everything from scratch," Barone says, "and when I can make something good enough for the students to enjoy, that's a thrill for me."


Don Stevenson

Custodian and NEA member Dominick Barone collects money from recycling cans—and uses it to cook special meals for up to 60 students at a time.

IN WYOMING

Bringing History to Life

If you were visited by two folks wearing buckskins, bearing furs, and cradling old muzzle-loading firearms, wouldn't Western history seem just a little more interesting?

Each year, fourth graders in Laramie County School District #1 make this rendezvous with the "Mountain Man" era, thanks to presentations by two NEA members—bus driver Madeline Thrush and maintenance worker "Coffee" Bob Buchholtz.

Outfitted as mountain men, these part-time historians visit classes to depict a time in the 19th century when adventuresome young men moved west from St. Louis and survived by trapping animals and selling furs.

Thrush and Buchholtz answer questions, set a trap, exhibit furs and beadwork, and demonstrate how to load both a full-stock "swamp barrel" flintlock and a caplock black-powder rifle.

"The kids love it," Thrush reports. "We always get letters of thanks from them. And teachers say this hands-on method helps them teach history.

"You can look in a book and see a picture of a mountain man with a foot on a bear," she explains, "but when you see Bob with his beard and buckskins, the mountain man becomes a living being. A kid can say, 'Hey, I actually talked to somebody like that.'"

Bus driver Madeline Thrush—a member of the Wyoming Education Association Local #1—dresses as a "mountain man" to make history come alive for students.

Richard Wright

Why We're Proud

IN TEXAS

Flying High

Bus driver George Ruiz knows that airplanes make big impressions on little kids. So do helicopters, fire engines, ambulances, and utility trucks.

And, unfortunately, so do gangs.

To keep kids' minds on school—and off drugs and violence—Ruiz makes arrangements to bring big vehicles to elementary school playgrounds in the Corpus Christi area. Once kids see them—and talk to their drivers—Ruiz hopes they'll see the benefit of staying in school.

"The kids get fired up about it," Ruiz says. "You ought to see the stacks of notes that kids have written me. One wrote: 'Now I know that my life is important to grown-ups.' To me, that means the program is working—big time."

Ruiz also does volunteer recruiting for the military. "I've always been pro-military. That's why we're free," he says. "I try to give the kids something to reach for."

The message extends to the inside of his bus, which is covered with pictures of airplanes. Ruiz's love of planes fills his house, as well—shelves and ceilings are covered with the 1,500 model airplanes he's built.

Ellen Hogue

Corpus Christi bus driver George Ruiz is an 18-year veteran and member of the Calallen Local Association. "We had a 10-year-old killed in a drive-by this year," Ruiz says. "That makes me want to do more."

IN COLORADO

A Craft in Itself

School secretary Patty Haneman and health aide Noreen Atwood hit on a creative new way to raise money for art education at Sunnyside Elementary in Durango.

By organizing two in-school craft fairs—each drawing up to 75 exhibitors—these two NEA members raised enough money to bring multicultural storyteller Sarah Ransom to Sunnyside for an extended stay.

Ransom spent two full weeks at the school, first telling each class Native American tales, then returning to tell stories from Mexico. At the end of each week, the students retold the tales—to parents, staffers, and other students.

"Noreen and I came up with the idea," Haneman says, "because we saw a way to bring in extra influences for the kids. They had a ball, a really good time with this.

"We're planning another craft fair for next year," she adds, "and counting on teachers to suggest specific artists they'd like to bring in—in either the performing or the physical arts."

The fairs, held in the school's gym, promise to become an annual tradition. Profits from refreshment sales at the last fair helped the Student Council buy and plant a honey locust tree for Earth Day. And a bake sale helped pay for field trips for fourth and fifth graders.

Patty Haneman

Noreen Atwood

Andrew Council

Patty Haneman and Noreen Atwood—both members of the Durango Support Personnel—organized a craft fair to raise the money to bring a storyteller to their school.

IN ALABAMA

A Thing of Beauty

When a local bank announced that it would award $500 teaching and learning grants to local educators, Jefferson County custodian Anthony Haynes was quick to apply.

"I wanted to help the kids I work with because I slipped when I was in school and my education didn't go as far as it should," Haynes explains. "I felt the need to make these kids feel good about themselves."

Haynes got the money—and used it to bolster the self-esteem of a group of elementary students who he says were "slipping through the cracks, not learning as fast as the others."

The 10-year custodian helped the kids build birdhouses and plant flowers and shrubs around Cahaba Elementary School and encouraged classes to "adopt" beautified spots around the building. The class with the best looking piece of turf won rights to a trophy that traveled around the school.

Of course, the project made members of the beautification crew pretty special people. "These kids—who had no fathers at home—were real excited," says Haynes. "Someone took the time to work with them on a Saturday and for once they didn't feel 'less' than the other kids, but rather part of them."

Custodian Anthony Haynes now works at Hillview Elementary School and is a member of the Jefferson County Education Support Personnel Organization. "I've come to realize that kids need as many positive people in their lives as possible," he says. "I can be there to give good, orderly direction."

Jeff Roberts

Why We're Proud

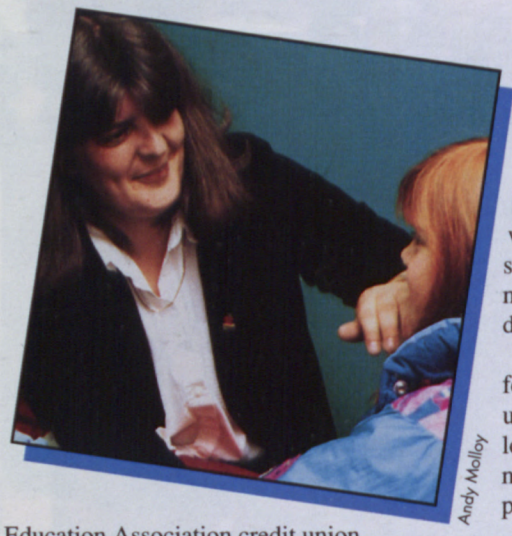
IN MAINE

$ense for Kids

It's just a few cents to school employees in Augusta—but it's enough for new clothes for the Doherty children whose home burned down, groceries for a family dealing with terminal illness, and an air purifier for Jessie LaCroix, a student with respiratory disease.

It's called $ense for Kids, and it's been organized by Joan Morin, an educational technician, and her local, the Augusta Education Association.

The concept is simple: School employees agree to contribute the odd change from each paycheck to the Maine Education Association credit union. Then people who need help apply for the money. "All of us have seen students in need and have dug out of our own pockets to help them," says Morin. "This is organized on a much greater scale."



Andy Molloy

Morin says $ense for Kids gave out $5,000 last year, all in small grants for winter clothes, sneakers, food, glasses, school supplies, and more. Local businesses have gotten into the act, too, donating money and materials.

"$ense for Kids lets the community feel a lot better about education and unionism," Morin says. "People don't look at us as just trying to get raises anymore. They see the amount of work we put into helping these kids."

Using money from the $ense for Kids fund, Joan Morin hands clothes to Faith Doherty, 6.

IN ARIZONA

Bus Drivers With a Cause

In Paradise Valley, school bus drivers "buy" the right not to wear uniforms each pay day by donating two cans of food or contributing $1 to help those in need.

And that's just a small example of the spirit of giving at Paradise Valley.

When they're not driving kids to school, NEA member June Johnson and a group of her Transportation Department colleagues can be found collecting clothes, food, or toys, running garage sales, going door-to-door for money, or cooking spaghetti for fundraising meals.

Simply put, says Johnson, "If somebody needs help, we provide it."

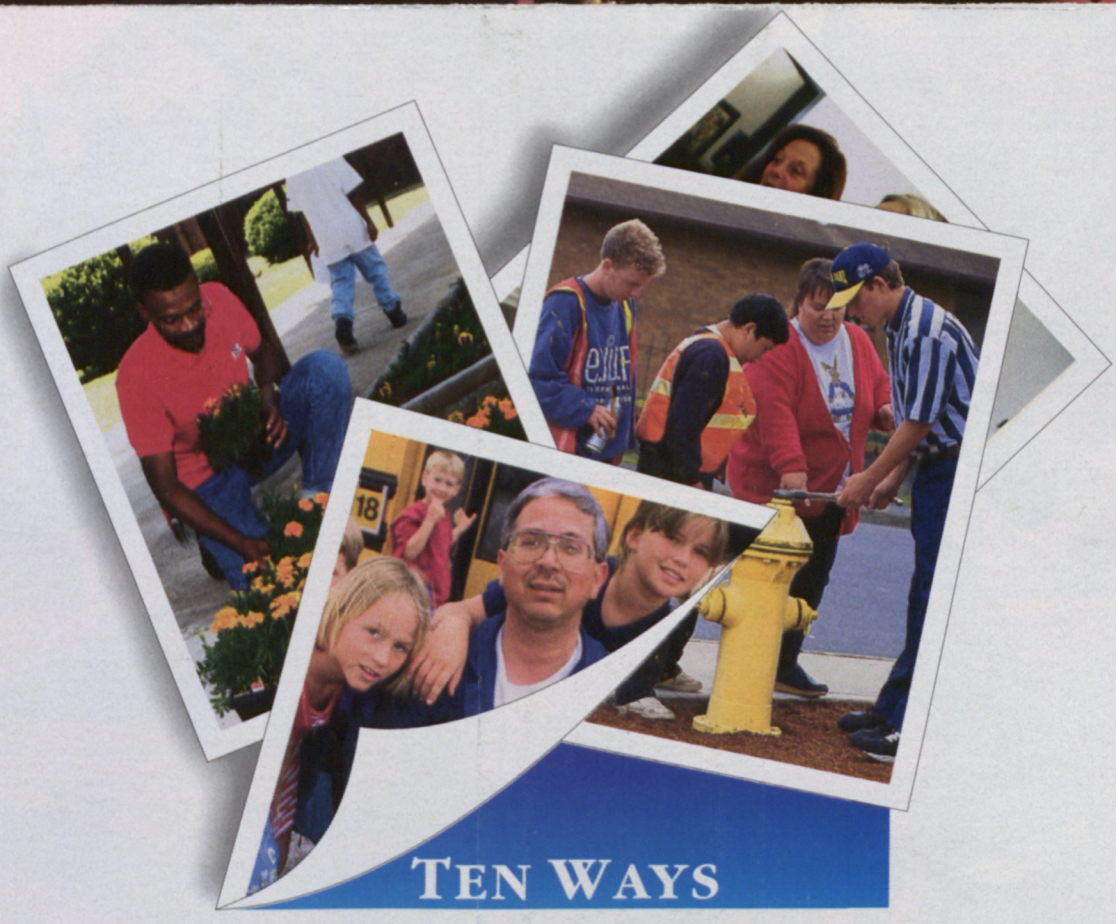
A 21-year veteran and Arizona Association of Pupil Transportation's 1996 Driver of the Year, Johnson is joined in these efforts by Activity Committee chair Gail Rasco, plus Becky Rojas, Carol Ackey, Alan Merkle, Margaret Henthorn, and Joyce Ballinger.

And lending support is Transportation Department Director Skip Brown. "If Skip knows an activity is safe and won't hurt anybody's feelings, we do it with his blessings," Johnson says.

When the activity is for children in need, these school employees pull out the stops. "In this job, you've got to like kids," concludes Johnson, "especially when you deal with 300 of them a day."

Don Stevenson

Members of the community service committee include transportation employees (left to right) Becky Rojas, Margaret Henthorn, Alan Merkle, June Johnson, Skip Brown, and Gail Rasco.



TEN WAYS

You Can Bring Your School and Community Together

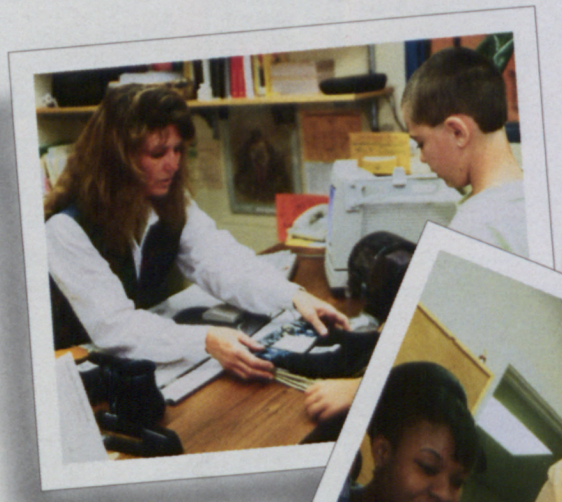
1. Take pride in what you do.

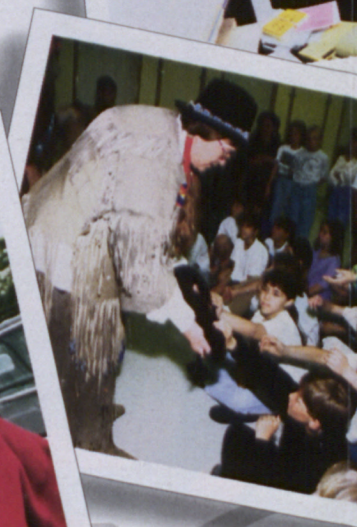
And don't be afraid to let everyone know it. Speak up at PTA and school board meetings, make a presentation to the local Rotary or Lion's Club, or sponsor a booth at a school or community fair.

2. Be an ambassador for public education.

Talk up the great things happening in your school—at every opportunity, whether you're doing your grocery shopping or just talking across the fence.

3.





7. Find occasions to celebrate.

Sponsor special events that reach out to all segments of your community—everything from a special salute for senior citizens on Grandparent's Day to a reading for Black History Month or a feast for Cinco de Mayo.

8. Provide a slice of life.

Invite community leaders to lunch at your school. Let the mayor, Chamber of Commerce officials, and members of the school board see what you do every day.

9. Make it easy for everyone to help kids.

Get involved in school decisions.

Advocate for support employee involvement in school decision making. Involve your neighbors, too, by reaching out to the business and union leaders in your town.

4. Invite parents to be partners.

Work with teachers to increase communication with parents. Call parents with good news. If you're bilingual, offer your services as a translator at back-to-school night or parent conferences.

5. Add something special to the mix.

Offer to teach students your special skill or hobby—be it quilting, carpentry, or CPR. Be a mentor or tutor for a student who needs extra attention. And, whenever you can, donate your skills to causes that benefit children or the community.

6. Be community players.

Become an active participant in school and community events. Get your NEA local affiliate to sponsor a softball team, build a float for the Fourth of July parade, or provide chaperones for the prom.

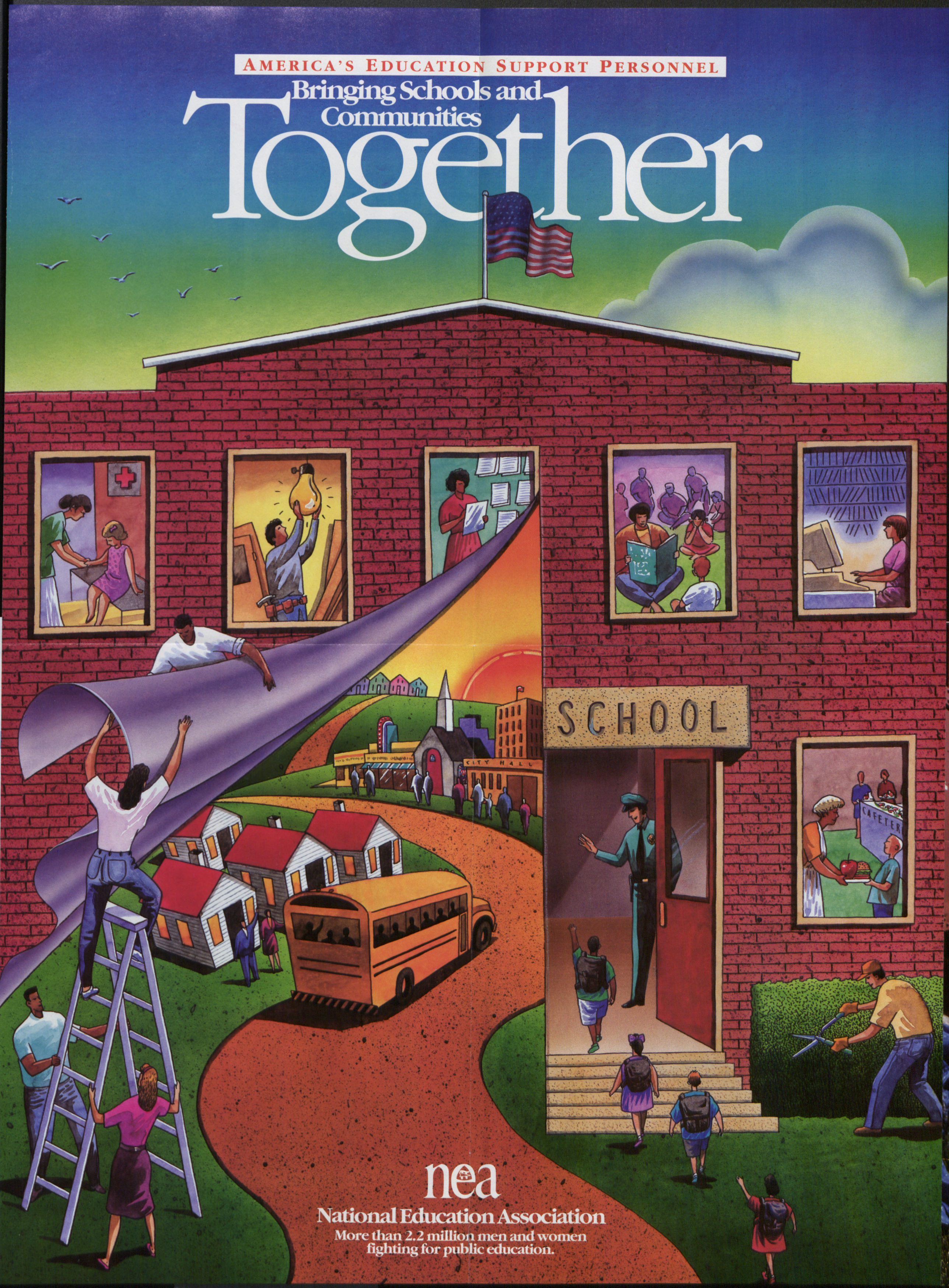
Create a $ense for Kids campaign by asking employees to donate the odd cents from their paychecks to a fund that helps needy kids buy eyeglasses, winter coats, or school supplies. Invite local businesses to contribute, too.

10. Give the media a good-news story to report.

Let local reporters know that there's a lot more to covering the education beat than talking to administrators and teachers. Tell local media folks the special things you do every day to provide the best possible public education for students.

AMERICA'S EDUCATION SUPPORT PERSONNEL

Bringing Schools and Communities Together



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National Education Association

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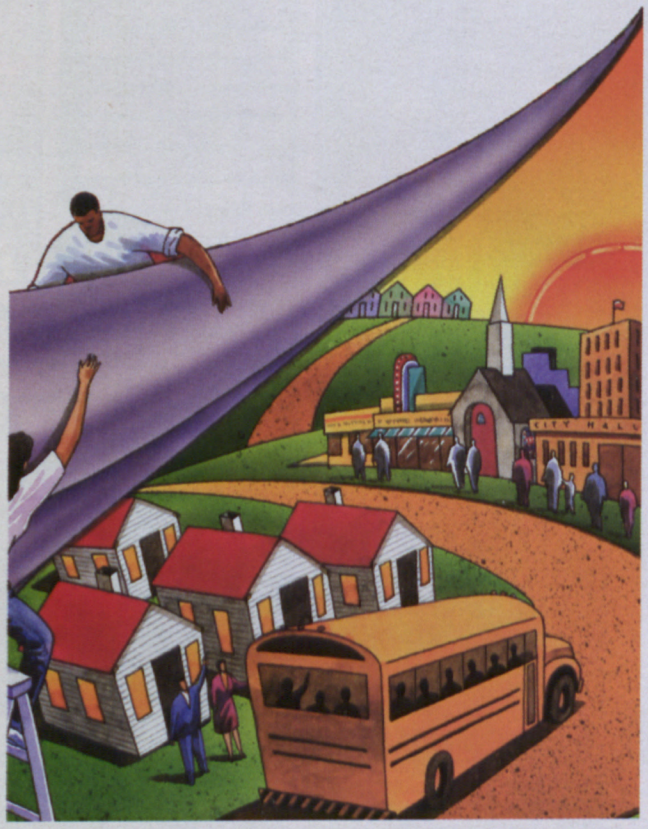

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National Education Association
Office of Education Support Personnel
1201 16th St., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

IN PENNSYLVANIA

Melting Metal After Work

Be it baseball or baking in the sun, your summer pastime probably preps you for 95-degree heat. Larry Curran, however, is braced for 1,300 degrees—just for starters.

Curran melts aluminum at that temperature and pours it into molds. That's when he's not casting parts with molten brass at—ooph—2,300 degrees.

Curran, a custodian for the Keystone School District in Knox, unwinds after work by heading over to his small foundry and pouring a few. He uses wooden patterns to make impressions in sand molds, melts down scrap metal, then ladles away—pouring everything from old-time locomotive bells to antique car parts.

While his dad machine-finishes parts and his mom answers the phone at Curran Castings, the owner does what he likes best—casting specialty parts that can't be purchased from larger foundries, like a 69-pound brass number plate for a restored steam engine.

Curran taught himself founding through reading and prying trade secrets from the professionals.

"I like being able to create something," he says. "With casting, you never know what you've got until you've opened the mold. It's like Christmas."

Curran took up the trade to survive during a layoff and pay for his hobby—collecting railroad memorabilia. Now his reputation for specialty work is cast—in brass.

"I like the satisfaction of taking a piece of scrap metal and making something out of it," says Larry Curran, a member of the Keystone Custodial Education Support Staff Association.

Keith Srakocic

Dennis Caldwell

Why We're Proud

IN WASHINGTON

Polishing Puyallup's Fire Plugs

Picture a huge map with thousands of fire hydrants that need gaskets, oil, painting, and weeding—studied by a diligent maintenance crew that conducts "business meetings" and keeps daily journals.

Now picture a crew of teenagers—all at-risk and developmentally delayed students from Rogers and Puyallup High Schools—and their supervisor, "job coach" Cheri Hammond.

It's all part of the Instructional Training Experience Transition Program, which gives special needs kids job experience, the work ethic, and lots of pride.

Aside from disassembling and painting hydrants, Hammonds' "On Fire" crews do fire station groundskeeping, paper recycling, and the grubby task of cleaning an oil recycling tank.

Ellen Banner

"I always pitch in," says Hammond, a paraeducator and member of the Puyallup Paraeducators Association. "I show them an easier way to rake, how to bend their knees, and the importance of safety first. They love it!"

The community loves it, too. One Puyallup resident was so impressed by the sight of high schoolers weeding a firehouse flower bed that she rushed to the store to buy them more flowers to plant.

Hammond is moved by the progress she witnesses: "Kids who used to have a chip on their shoulders—who were rude, angry, and untalkative—are now out there getting nothing but compliments, even from the fire and police chiefs. Now they can hold a job with the best of them. They can give back to the community what the community gave to them."

Cheri Hammond shows four students how to do routine maintenance on a fire hydrant. Not pictured, but part of the team: special ed teachers Lela Eisenbacher and Ed Pong.

IN MARYLAND

Computer is Baker's Helper

He works at the base of the food pyramid—with wholesome bread and grains—but head baker Michael van Brunt reached a career pinnacle last year when he won the Maryland Department of Education's annual menu-planning contest.

To win, van Brunt, who works at Southern Middle School in Garrett County, played to his strengths—more than 30 years in food service, a knack for computers, and an expertise in grains, which hold a critical spot in the food pyramid.

MSTA

"I planned five school lunches with a lot of grains. That's what the state was looking for," he says. "And I held fat at 30 percent, sodium at 1,000 milligrams or less, and calories at one-third the recommended daily amount."

To do it, van Brunt used his computer link to the World Wide Web to track changes in the U.S. Department of Agriculture's nutritional guidelines. Then, with training from the Garrett County Health Department, he entered his recipes into a data base and got an accurate nutritional analysis.

Among van Brunt's winning courses: "Porcupine Meatballs," "Mexican Lasagna," and "Zippy Cauliflower."

For food service workers with computer links, van Brundt suggests the USDA "Meal Talk" forum (Mealtalk@nal.usda.gov). It's a good place to share secrets—and get advice from—registered dieticians and food service directors nationwide.

Michael van Brunt, a member of the Garrett Education Support Personnel Association, is certified as a manager by the American Food Service Association.

IN ILLINOIS

A Poster for Your Thoughts

The poster packs a one-two punch. First the photo sets you up with a dramatic shot of a man in a prison cell. Then the words hit hard: "Some places don't require a good education."

David Arnold, head custodian for Brownstown schools, thought this poster up, then put it up in both school hallways and in local businesses last fall during American Education Week.

"High school kids told me this was a good idea, that it reminded them that the majority of people in prison did not graduate," says Arnold, president of the Brownstown ESP Association. "And when elementary kids asked me about the poster, I said, 'Think about it. Without a good education, what will your future be like?'"

Another poster, proclaiming "Our Children, Our Schools, Our Future: American Education Week," was signed by all 13 local Association members—custodians, secretaries, cooks, bus drivers, and teachers' aides—then put up in schools and all over town.

On their first day of school this fall, Brownstown Elementary students will see "welcome" signs produced by the Brownstown ESP Association. Rest assured, it won't be the last time the local puts its feelings on the walls.

"We not only work in the schools," says David Arnold, head custodian and president of the Brownstown ESP, "we constantly support education and the students."

Dennis Caldwell

Why We're Proud

Eileen Connors

Leaders from the Classified School Employees Council of Las Cruces include (left to right): instructional assistant Milas McLeod, maintenance worker Thomas Sanchez, food service worker Melissa Sanchez, and custodian Michael LaVertu. The word "Juntos" on their shirts means "together."

ACROSS A CONTINENT

Organizing the Unorganized

Scott Bidwell, a locksmith for the Fairbanks school district in **Alaska,** goes the extra mile to help other support employees organize. In fact, he recently flew 250 miles to five remote bush communities to help workers—predominantly Native Alaskans—establish new Association locals.

Sometimes speaking through a translator, this NEA-Alaska activist helped the workers "understand what they could enjoy by having a contract and what they need to do to organize." The result: These employees are now negotiating their first agreement.

And they're not the only ones investing in Association membership:

➤ In less than a year, 500 support employees in **Puerto Rico**—from secretaries to school guards—have joined the Association to tackle issues like low pay, non-existent classifications, and inadequate training.

In organizing meetings around the island, the Asociación de Maestros de Puerto Rico is urging support employees to affiliate with—and derive strength from—its existing teachers' locals.

➤ In May, NEA-**New Mexico** and the American Federation of Teachers teamed up to win a representation election for 88 custodial workers in Las Cruces. The vote: a lopsided 53-4. Insufficient turnout cost the election for 39 maintenance workers, but "if they're ready to go next year, we'll file for an election again," says UniServ Director Doug Petro.

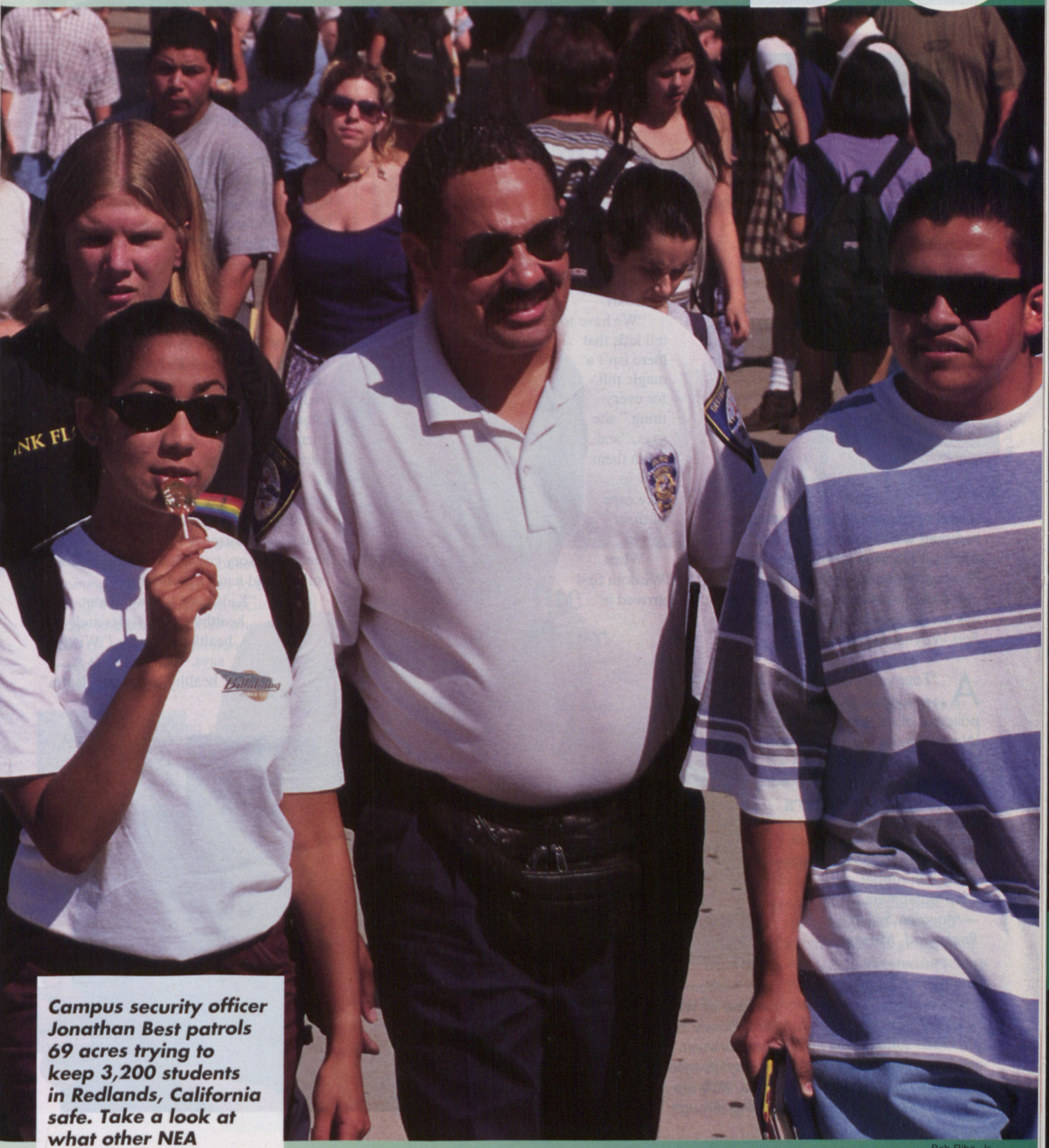
The custodians, who are now making bargaining preparations, will focus on issues like low pay, unfair treatment, and inconsistent work rules. They may soon have more allies—NEA and AFT will next file for some 600 Las Cruces food service workers and educational assistants.

➤ Building "inclusive" locals is also the goal of the **South Carolina** Education Association, which now boasts 1,000 support members—a 50 percent jump over the past three years.

South Carolina support workers, who can be suspended or fired without cause, are now working through the Association to win legislation guaranteeing due process rights and job security. And, through SCEA workshops, newly organized workers are learning the early warning signs of subcontracting and how to use research to fight back.

➤ The **Kentucky** Education Support Personnel Association, now 34 locals strong, has recruited some 400 new members since January. Building on groundbreaking legislation passed last year—guaranteeing due process to support employees—KESPA is mobilizing members to lobby for more legislative gains and push for enforcement of wage and hour laws.

What We Do



Campus security officer Jonathan Best patrols 69 acres trying to keep 3,200 students in Redlands, California safe. Take a look at what other NEA members do.

Bob Riha, Jr.

What We Do Health Services

Q. How has AIDS affected your job?

A. "It makes me a little more wary. It used to be that when a kid was hurt on the playground, I would just pick him up. Now I have to worry about the blood. We can't get as close to the kids."
—W. Wightman Reilly
West Minot, Maine

A. "I'm an intensive-care nurse, so I've always used universal precautions. I treat every child the same, because we don't know which one may have HIV."
—Patricia Weinwurm
Binghamton, New York

A. "I feel that I'm more conscious of it, because I work in a high school with sexually active teenagers. I worked with two men who died of AIDS, so I tend to be a little more compassionate about it. Students don't take it seriously enough."
—Kay Wheeler
Fort Wayne, Indiana

A. "Four years ago, when I began working here, there was no policy at all concerning AIDS. We set up our own exposure control program. We have 27 nurses in this district—now each one is responsible for going over universal precautions with the school staff. As a result, every teacher carries a fanny pack with rubber gloves and other equipment."
—Maureen Swingle
Rockwood, Missouri

The Wisdom of Prevention

"Prevention is the answer to health problems," says school nurse Ruth Wisdom. It's also the one word that sums up Wisdom's 20-year effort to improve the lives of students in Windsor, Missouri.

"We have to tell kids that there isn't a magic pill for everything," she says, "and teach them how to take care of themselves."

When Wisdom first arrived in Windsor middle and high schools 20 years ago, the district's health program, like many throughout the nation, consisted of little more than band-aids and aspirin.

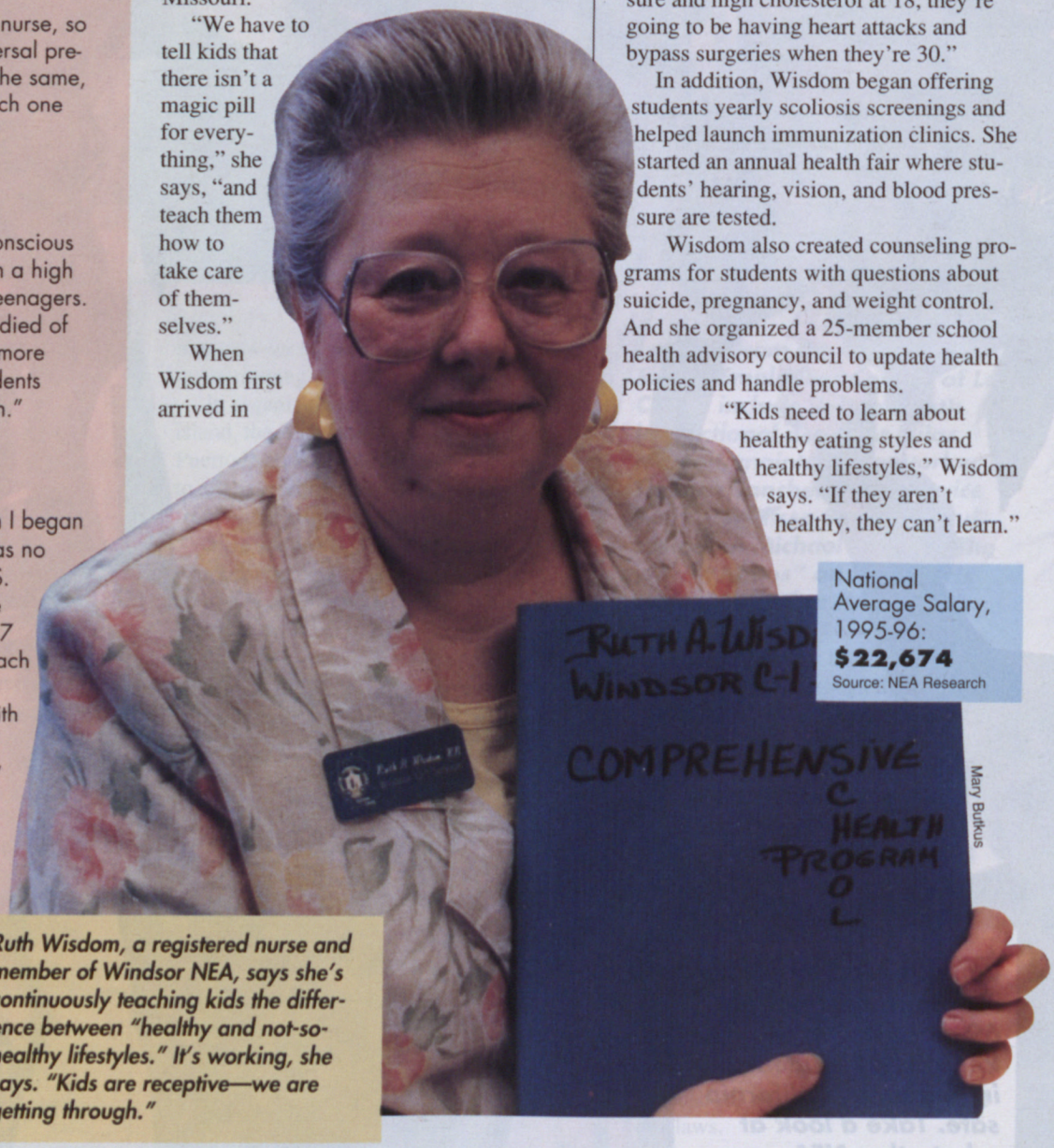
Since then, Wisdom has helped to organize and implement a districtwide school health program for health care and health education.

"Health education should be a priority in every school," Wisdom says. "If students leave school with high blood pressure and high cholesterol at 18, they're going to be having heart attacks and bypass surgeries when they're 30."

In addition, Wisdom began offering students yearly scoliosis screenings and helped launch immunization clinics. She started an annual health fair where students' hearing, vision, and blood pressure are tested.

Wisdom also created counseling programs for students with questions about suicide, pregnancy, and weight control. And she organized a 25-member school health advisory council to update health policies and handle problems.

"Kids need to learn about healthy eating styles and healthy lifestyles," Wisdom says. "If they aren't healthy, they can't learn."



Ruth Wisdom, a registered nurse and member of Windsor NEA, says she's continuously teaching kids the difference between "healthy and not-so-healthy lifestyles." It's working, she says. "Kids are receptive—we are getting through."

National Average Salary, 1995-96: **$22,674**
Source: NEA Research

What We Do Security Services

Q. What's the one thing you'd like parents to do to make your school safer?

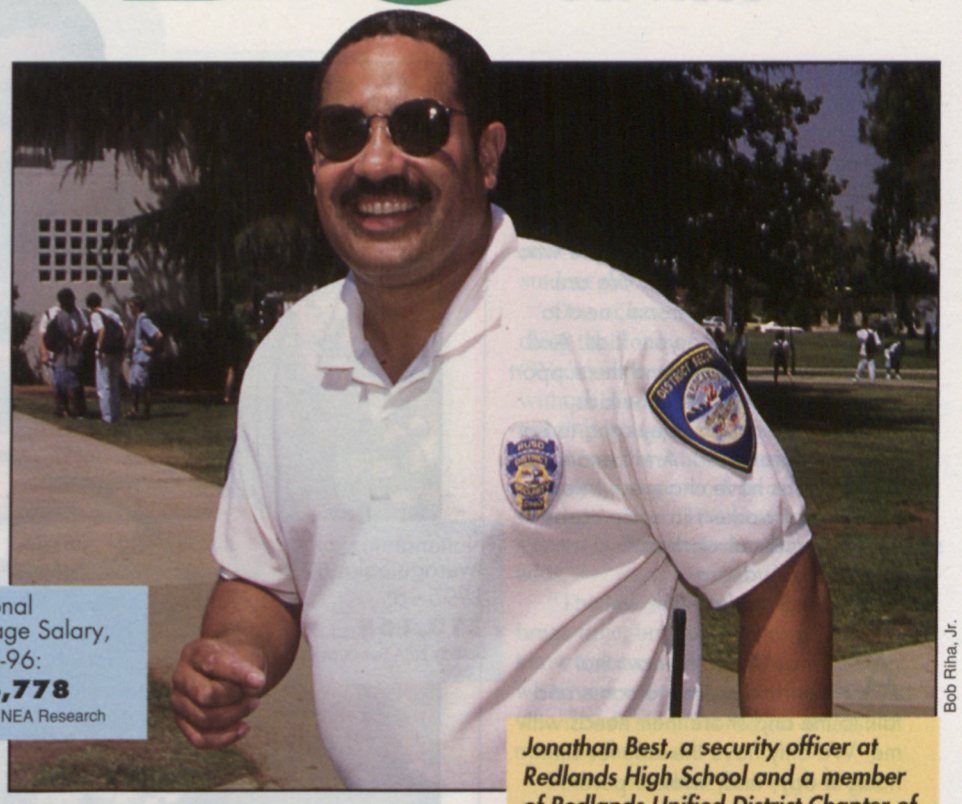
A. "Pay attention to their children's friends. If parents can spot who their kids are hanging around with, they can handle minor problems before they become major ones."
—Floyd Smith
Little Rock, Arkansas

A. "Realize that we are here for the safety of their children and the safety of anyone who should happen to walk in through our doorway. As far as the children go, we just try to mold character and get them prepared for life after school."
—Willie Moore
Flint, Michigan

A. "That would have to be communication. I really believe that communicating is the key to everything. Parents, kids, and security staff have to come to a point where we can all have an understanding."
—Ray Scott
Oakcliff, Texas

A. "Start teaching your children respect for one another as soon as humanly possible. They should grow up in a non-violent atmosphere and respect everyone. If this is taught at home and is reinforced in the school, then I think a lot of our problems—not all—will go away."
—Richard Malizia
Union City, New Jersey

A. "We need parents to be more aware of their children. I think that a lot of the parents are unaware of what their kids do all day. I know it's difficult, but I think it would help us solve some behavioral problems."
—Joe Cruz
Gurnee, Illinois



Bob Riha, Jr.

National Average Salary, 1995-96:
$24,778
Source: NEA Research

Jonathan Best, a security officer at Redlands High School and a member of Redlands Unified District Chapter of the NEA, says the "excellent rapport" he's developed with students helps him do the best possible job.

Breaking the Sound Barrier

When Jonathan Best started his job as a campus security officer at Redlands High School in southern California four years ago, he was disturbed by what he heard from the students.

He heard nothing. "For whatever reason, they didn't think I was approachable," says Best. "They kept their distance."

With a population of 3,200 students and 69 acres to patrol, "student information is invaluable to me. Without their help," he adds, "it would be impossible for me to do my job."

So, Best set out to get to know the students at his school.

"I went out every day and talked to them. I asked them about their school work or about any activities they were involved in. If they played sports, I went and watched. If they were in a play, I saw it."

The strategy paid off.

"Now, if they're having a problem at home or at school, they feel like they can talk to me. A lot of times, I don't feel like I'm a security officer—I feel like a counselor."

That rapport, Best says, helps him do his job.

"Students fill me in all the time. For instance, a young lady told me about some drug activity that was going on in her English class. Another student told us there was a young man who was drinking beer on campus.

"I carry handcuffs, pepper spray, a small first aid kit, and a radio," Best notes, "and I think these items are important. But really, this job comes down to the ability to communicate."

What We Do Para-professionals

Q. If you could say one thing to parents about your job, what would it be?

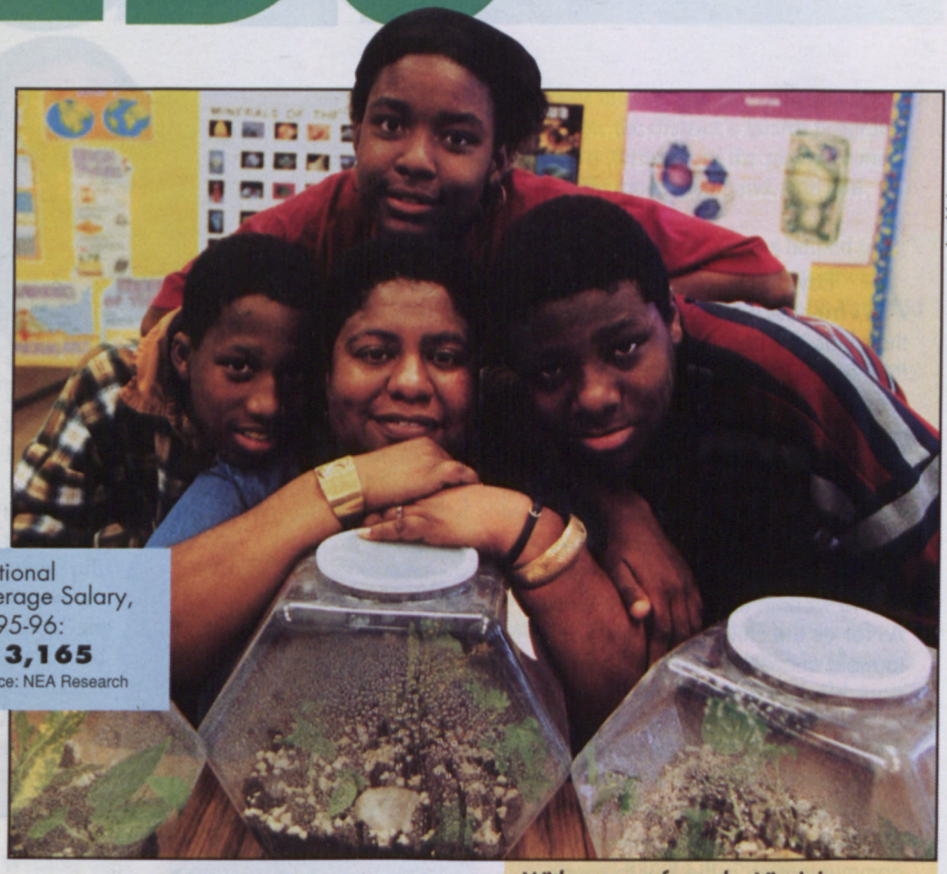
A. "We're not just the people who run dittos anymore. We are right there in the classroom, next to the teacher, teaching your kids. And we need your support and the support of the community. Also, the kids aren't as innocent as they used to be. They are street-smart. And because of this, our jobs have changed. We are more social workers in some cases than instructional workers."
—Barbara Auditore
Kent, Washington

A. "I want them to know that they're welcome to come and talk to me and share their needs with me. We only have the kids for six hours a day, and, without parent involvement, we can't really help these children."
—Jane Bausa
San Diego, California

A. "The parents need to be aware that they are the child's first teacher and we are there to further educate that child—working as a team. Parents have the impression that once they send their kids off to school, they're finished. I would encourage them to come into the school and volunteer."
—Annie Coleman
Richmond, Virginia

A. "I love working with their children. I love seeing how anxious and eager they are. You can almost see the imaginary light bulbs clicking over their heads when they connect with an idea. It's very exciting."
—Paula Dutile
Lebanon, New Hampshire

National Average Salary, 1995-96:
$13,165
Source: NEA Research



Joe Mahoney

With a grant from the Virginia Education Association, paraprofessional Vivian Lucas-Graves teaches kids to make a rain forest in a jar. With her are, left to right, students Montrell Moseley, Britney Dendy, and Defredrick Young.

Save the Rain Forest

Because people depend on it for food, rain, and medicine, the rapid destruction of the world's rain forests alarms Richmond, Virginia special education instructional assistant Vivian Lucas-Graves.

"We are destroying the rain forest for the timber," she says, "and, just maybe, we're destroying the cure for cancer or AIDS in the process."

To teach her middle and high school students about the rain forest, Lucas-Graves applied for and received an instructional grant from the Virginia Education Association last year.

With the money, Lucas-Graves took students to botanical gardens and an herb farm. She taught them to grow "mini rain forests" in jars, explained how people in rain forests gather honey, and allowed them to taste rain forest "candy"—Brazil nuts, cashews, chocolate without artificial sweeteners, papaya, pineapple, mangoes, and honey.

Lucas-Graves says that by studying the rain forest, her students learned how important it was to protect the earth.

"They learned that all of the elements on the periodic table are in the earth and in their bodies," she says. "I told them that they are fed from the Earth, grown from the Earth, and watered from the Earth."

Lucas-Graves also showed her students that they are members of the global community. "It's my responsibility to let them see they are world residents," she says, "not just Richmond residents."

What We Do

Secretarial, Clerical, Administrative Services

Q. What do you do to make parents feel welcome in your school or school district?

A. "Parents don't usually come to see me in person, since I'm in an office of social work, so my contact with parents is by telephone. I let them shoot off their problems and frustrations to me, and I just listen."
—Muriel Wimberly
Richmond, Virginia

A. "I make sure that they're greeted immediately and give them a friendly smile. I acknowledge them the minute they arrive."
—Mary Christiansen
Mesa, Arizona

A. "I show them a friendly face and a smile. There's good and bad in everyone, but it's easier to pass the buck than it is to help someone."
—Ileene Collin Berenson
Beverly Hills, California

A. "Well, some parents are easier to deal with than others, but I try to provide a friendly atmosphere. I get to know the family, and I treat their child as my child."
—Beverly Smith
Berrien Springs, Maryland

A. "I try to smile a lot. I meet them in the office as soon as they get there, so that they're not standing around, and I always introduce myself."
—Nancy Stauch
Bayville, New Jersey

Workload? What Workload?

"It used to be that typing 40 words per minute and taking shorthand dictation at 80 words per minute would land you a good office job," says Kay Barclay of the National Association of Educational Office Professionals.

"Not anymore," she says. "Today's school secretary is an office professional who is knowledgeable about word processing, spreadsheets, computer graphics, desktop publishing, E-mail, voice mail, databases, and bar charts."

Peggie Critzer, a school secretary who works in the guidance office of C. Milton Wright High School in Bel Air, Maryland, just laughs when asked if she thinks the workload of secretaries is increasing.

She begins her day at 6:30 a.m., relieving early-arriving administrators from phone work. "That's the first line of duty," she says. "Then there are always a myriad of other things to do: work permits to make out, questions to answer, student records to be sent out."

One of her biggest concerns is handling the flood of new technology. "We're expected to jump in and make do without much experience or training. The training is supposed to come later.

"Also, the school administration assigns us more work because they're overloaded, too. Every secretary in the system is overworked and underpaid," she adds.

"The law says we're supposed to have break time, but quite honestly, I don't know a secretary who takes it. Luckily, we have a very understanding principal who makes sure that we get at least 45 minutes for lunch."

Secretaries must find ways to get through the day, and Critzer, a member of the Harford County Educational Services Council/MSTA, has a few of her own.

"I am an extremely organized person, I have student aides—I don't know what I'd do without them—and I work in a marvelous department, where the whole staff pitches in."

Chris Hartlove

School secretaries like NEA member Peggie Critzer are deep in the trenches of the information revolution.

National Average Salary, 1995-96:
$21,392
Source: NEA Research

What We Do

Trades, Crafts, Machine Operation

Q. What have you done to improve the learning environment for students in your school district?

A. "I make sure that the kitchen equipment is always up to snuff, so that the ladies can cook their meals. I take care of the cooling equipment so the food doesn't spoil. I make sure that the controls in each room are adequate."
—John Kurt
Fort Wayne, Indiana

A. "My department helps kids learn the latest technology by putting together computer cabinets. The carpenters build them, and, as an electrician, I put the circuitry in. We build both computer cabinets and experimental stations for robotics instruction."
—Pete Pitsch
Rock Springs, Wyoming

A. "I've been doing legislative and lobbying work for two to three years to get a vocational high school in this county. Not all these kids are going to college. If we could get them into a vocational school where they could work with their hands and learn a skilled trade, we'd have a lot fewer problems in the schools."
—Larry Bowman
Pensacola, Florida

A. "I teach at Wayne-Westland School District and work as a carpenter over at Garden City School District. I teach building trades—anything in the construction industry. We try as much as we can to make sure each classroom is maintained in the best possible way so that each student can get the best out of the school."
—Mike Schuster
Garden City, Michigan

Stephen Crompton

National Average Salary, 1995-96: **$29,788**
Source: NEA Research

As a female boiler operator, Linda Frahm serves as a role model for young people who often consider leaving the economically depressed city of Ashtabula, Ohio. "They see me every day, and they know that I'm happy doing what I'm doing."

Tending the Fire

You might not expect a woman to be a boiler operator, but for Linda Frahm, it's a family affair.

"My mother was a boiler operator and she worked for the city as well," says Frahm. "When I reached the top of the pay scale as a custodian, I went to school to earn my boiler operator license.

"I was the only female in the class, and I scored the highest. When a boiler operator job came up, I took it."

Now Frahm, a member of the Ashtabula Association of Classified Employees, works nine months a year as a custodian and boiler operator, returning to straight custodial duties in the summer.

"The first thing that I do when I come in is check the boiler. I test the water and, if it needs chemicals, I add them. Ohio state law says that I can't leave the boiler room for more than 20 minutes, so I go do my custodial work for awhile, and then rush back down."

Working with fire has its dangers—Frahm remembers one close call. "I had shut down the boiler for a time and made sure it was secure. Then I went to take my lunch break," she notes.

"One of my colleagues asked me if I smelled natural gas, so I went to look, and there was fire shooting out the door of the boiler. Apparently, someone had set the controls to 'high fire.' It was all right, but for a moment, it scared the pants off me."

Those moments are the exception, not the rule. On a daily basis, Frahm says, "I keep the school clean, safe, and warm for the season."

What We Do

Building & Grounds Maintenance

Q. Have recycling and environmental efforts changed your job?

A. "Yes, quite a bit. We have to separate all of our paper and trash now. The kids help us with the collection. I guess it's a lot more work, but it can be licked by a group of people working together. It's a great thing, and I think it's good for the future."
—Joe Bitetti
Dover, New Hampshire

A. "I think recycling and environmental efforts may have added about 15 or 20 minutes more effort to our jobs, but I think it's worth it."
—Larry Jelken
Lake Mills, Wisconsin

A. "Recycling up here hasn't really gotten going because of the number of people and the remoteness of our location, so it's done on a real small scale so far. But I think that it's definitely going to come about because of our limited resources. It makes things better for the future."
—Mark Kaiser
Mobridge, South Dakota

A. "The kids are responsible for taking the paper to the recycling bin. It's part of the educational program at my school, and it's a good thing for the children. They learn to protect the environment, they learn how important recycling is."
—Genevieve Smith
McKeesport, Pennsylvania

National Average Salary, 1995-96:
$20,869
Source: NEA Research

From the Ground Up

Woodstock Elementary had it all—and wanted to get rid of it.

With overcrowding in the classrooms, electrical woes, and repair costs going through the roof, 58-year-old Woodstock Elementary in Bethel, Vermont was in desperate need of renovation.

Voters acknowledged the problem by passing a $2 million bond and establishing a building committee to review the proposed plans and offer suggestions. The committee included the usual players—the contractor, the principal, local business leaders, parents, teachers.

Oh yeah, and one custodian.

Ronald Watts, an 18-year veteran custodian at Woodstock, was asked to serve on the committee because of his unique knowledge of the building.

"I basically acted as a consultant," Watts says. "I just explained how certain areas of the building operated and where I saw deficiencies."

Although he's modest about his role, Watts's peers sing his praises.

"Ronnie really wanted to make sure everything went well," says Norman Frates, Woodstock's principal. "He focused on some areas that a lot of us had forgotten about, areas that really needed attention, like boilers, broken motors, and roof problems."

Peter Cross, a teacher at Woodstock, describes Watts as "a tireless member of the committee, attending public information meetings at night and providing the input necessary for a successful bond vote."

After two years of planning, the first shovels went into the ground in June.

"It's been quite satisfying watching the planning go from a seed to a completed job," Watts says.

Raj Chawla

Custodian Ron Watts, a member of the Woodstock Elementary Education Association, played a crucial role in developing the plans for renovating this 325-student elementary school in central Vermont.

What We Do Technical Services

Q. Do you think student access to the Internet at school should be limited?

A. "I think there has to be a control of some type. It can't just be wide open. When they're at school, children should not use the Internet for purposes other than education. I work in a high school, and high school kids will try to do anything."
—Arleen Brown
Middletown, Rhode Island

A. "I had one student come in who was doing an article on racism, and he accessed a section on white power. There are elements on campus that are in that movement, so I was a little apprehensive. As a result, we're having a staff meeting to discuss whether to limit access."
—Sharon Carelli
Palo Cedro, California

A. "Students should have total access—until they abuse it. I will trust kids to the point that they show me that they can't be trusted. I give them the benefit of the doubt."
—Renee McIntyre
Naperville/Aurora, Illinois

A. "Our network is being monitored, so we can get an idea if any unscrupulous activity is going on. We're just in the process of putting in the system for when the kids return in the fall, so at this point, I'm not really sure how we're going to handle it."
—Alex Agner
Colorado Springs, Colorado

Tutors & Computers

"Helping kids." That's how Franklin Brooks summarizes his job. As computer manager at Fairview Elementary School in Camden, Arkansas, Brooks uses his skills—and technology—to tutor kids who need a boost.

"I basically work one-on-one with the kids, because I've been with all of them at one time or another," he says. "I help them with reading and writing problems so they don't fall too far behind in their classes."

About a year ago, the Camden school opened its computer lab and began looking for a manager. At the time, Brooks was a substitute teacher—with a degree in computer science. He got the job.

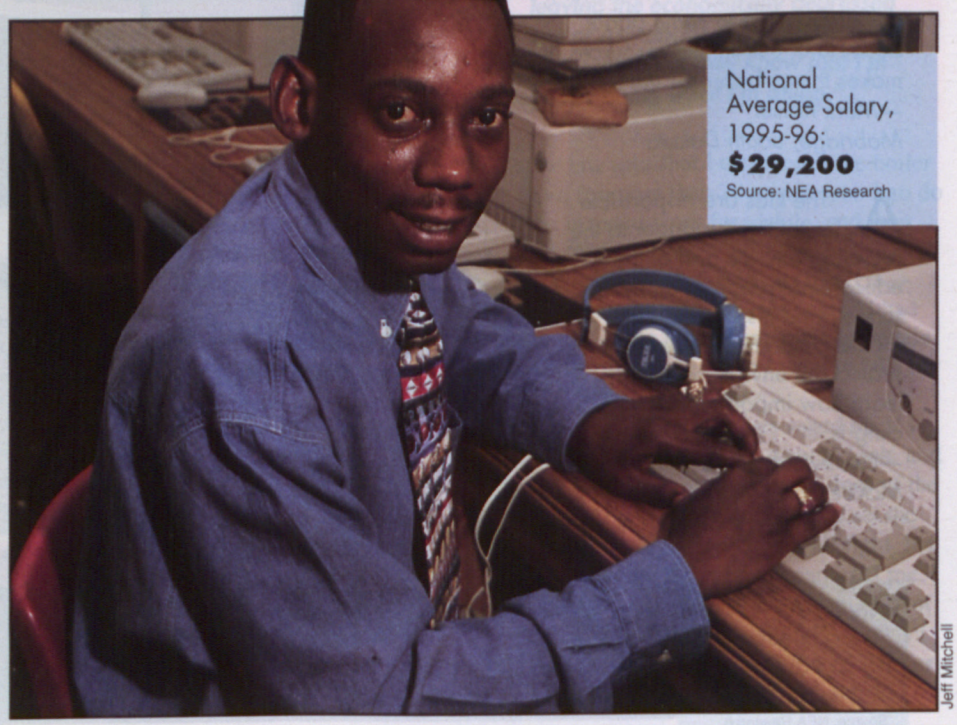
"The students get excited when Franklin's in the computer lab," says Carolyn Oakley, a teacher and president of the Camden Fairview Education Association. "Given the number of single-parent homes in our community, the boys, in particular, look to Franklin as a mentor."

Brooks clearly has a special rapport with the kids—at school, in the community, and at home.

"I have a personal computer at home," says Brooks, "and I tutor children in the evenings. I let them mess around with the computer, and I show them where to go and how to find things."

But as any school employee knows, success with kids doesn't come easy. To those people considering starting a computer lab at their own schools, Brooks offers this advice: "Even if you're willing to work at it, you'll need a lot of patience."

An active member of the Camden Fairview Education Association, Franklin Brooks often says, "If you're going to be part of something, you need to be in it all the way—or get out of the way."



Jeff Mitchell

National Average Salary, 1995-96:
$29,200
Source: NEA Research

What We Do

Food Service

Q. If money were no problem, what would you do to improve the nutritional value of what you serve?

A. "I would try to promote healthy eating by serving the children foods low in fat. I would also hire a nutritionist. Right now we're on a budget, and we can't buy a lot of the things that are low in fat because those items tend to be more expensive."
—Gloria Jenkins
Monroe, Louisiana

A. "I don't think money is the answer. We just have to get kids to realize why they should eat healthier. We could serve them lobster on the line and they'd throw it away. Kids are fussy nowadays. It's going to take time, but hopefully, they'll come our way."
—Kathy Pittman
Mandran, North Dakota

A. "I'd like to eliminate French fries. They're a staple for these kids. Sometimes, if we don't have French fries, they just don't eat."
—Virginia Bailer
Section, Alabama

A. "I wouldn't rely so much on the government, because some of the items they provide have too much fat. For instance, they send us pure butter, which has too much fat. So, if I could, I'd buy a butter substitute that's lower in fat."
—Debbie Rosser
Mesa, Arizona

A. "I would like to start a program where a staffer could go into the classroom and share nutritional tips with the students. The more nutritional information they have, the healthier they tend to eat."
—Gloria Wilmarth
Holcombe, Wisconsin

National Average Salary, 1995-96:
$12,044
Source: NEA Research

David Richard

Mary Etta Foster, a member of the District #4 Education Association, helps a student create a healthy snack.

Fit Fast Food

When it comes to snacks, most kids think of chocolate, chips, and fries. But thanks to the efforts of Wyoming chef Mary Etta Foster, the kids at Laura Irwin Elementary now consider some healthier alternatives.

Five years ago, Foster, a food service manager for Big Horn Country School District, decided it was time to do something about the amount of junk food her students were consuming.

"A lot of these kids just like to eat fast food—pizza, hamburgers, fries," she says. "They don't want anything that's good for them." So Foster and her colleagues began to visit classrooms and show students how to make nutritious treats.

From the traditional—celery sticks with peanut butter—to the fanciful—a fruit carousel made from apple slices, peanut butter, gum drops and animal crackers—Foster teaches her kids that food need not be high in fat to be tasty.

"We just want these kids to realize that there is more to life than hot dogs and hamburgers," Foster says.

Apparently some have.

"After our presentation, a lot of these children went home and taught their brothers and sisters how to make some of the snacks we showed them," Foster says. "We've gotten a lot of positive feedback—especially about the fruit carousel.

"We don't expect to reach all of them. But if we only affect one or two kids, it's worth it."

What We Do

Transportation, Delivery, Vehicle Mechanics

Q. How do you get kids and parents to trust you?

A. "I think it's honesty. I tell them exactly what I expect from them from the beginning, and I accept no less. I'm also a fair person. I could write up kids when they misbehave, but I try not to do that. Instead, I personally contact the parents and try to work something out with them."
—Viola Murphy
Effort, Pennsylvania

A. "I try to treat the kids not as kids, but as young adults. When I talk to parents about their child, I try to emphasize good qualities as well as bad ones."
—Bob Deno
Pilot Rock, Oregon

A. "By being nice and courteous. I talk with them. I reassure kids about what might happen. I'm there for them. If parents make a special request for their child, I try to accommodate them."
—Donna Appleget
Levittown, Pennsylvania

A. "That just comes with time. You have to be there for the kids and be honest with the parents. I treat the kids as if they were my own children."
—Kathleen Huffmaster
Hazelwood, Missouri

A. "Usually before school starts, I try to meet the parents. I introduce myself and tell them what I expect. I stress safety with parents, because we care about the students."
—Karen Lyerla
Columbus, Ohio

Kester Gilhome

National Average Salary, 1995-96:
$20,383
Source: NEA Research

Bus driver Shirley Howard's not stern, but if kids don't do their homework, they have to get by her first.

Riding the Homework Bus

For most kids, the bus trip to school each morning is a free ride. But that's not true for the kids in Midland, Texas who live on Shirley Howard's route.

Howard's kids have to pay to ride the bus. The price: presentation of one homework assignment.

"It's more of a bluff than anything else," admits Howard, a bus driver for the Midland Independent School District, "but the young kids really believe it. They think that if they don't have their homework, they won't be allowed on the bus, and they'll have to go back home and get a ride to school from their mom or dad."

Of course, sometimes kids really don't have their homework—and Howard's ready for that. "They'll tell me that they left it at a friend's house or at their grandma's. I tell them that the next day they better have two homework assignments to show me."

To help kids who are having trouble with their homework, Howard offers tutoring after school. "I feel that some kids can't ask their teachers for help," she says, "so they come to me."

Homework's not the only assignment on Howard's bus. "My first pick-up of the day is with younger kids, and to break the ice, we wait until everyone is on the bus and then say 'good morning' together," Howard explains.

"And we were the first bus in Midland to do a toy drive," she adds. "The kids brought new and used toys for the Salvation Army and for foster homes."

A member of the Texas State Teachers Association/NEA, Howard plans to keep the assignments flying. "I started this five years ago," she says, "and it works."

What We Want

Florida maintenance technician Les Ehama wants quality training available for all support employees. Find out what he—and other NEA members—do to get what they want.

Tom Burton

From School To Work

Support employees have always played a role in helping students see the connection between the worlds of school and work. But as "school-to-work" initiatives gain steam around the country, support employees nationwide are finding themselves on the cutting edge of educational change.

Take Lynne Hardin, for example. A career services specialist at McKay High School in Salem, **Oregon**, Hardin's having a good day. A student in her school-to-work program discovered that engineering is definitely *not* for him.

Hardin harbors no ill will toward engineers. She's excited because her student made an educated career decision, thanks to the innovative program that let him "shadow" a real engineer for a day.

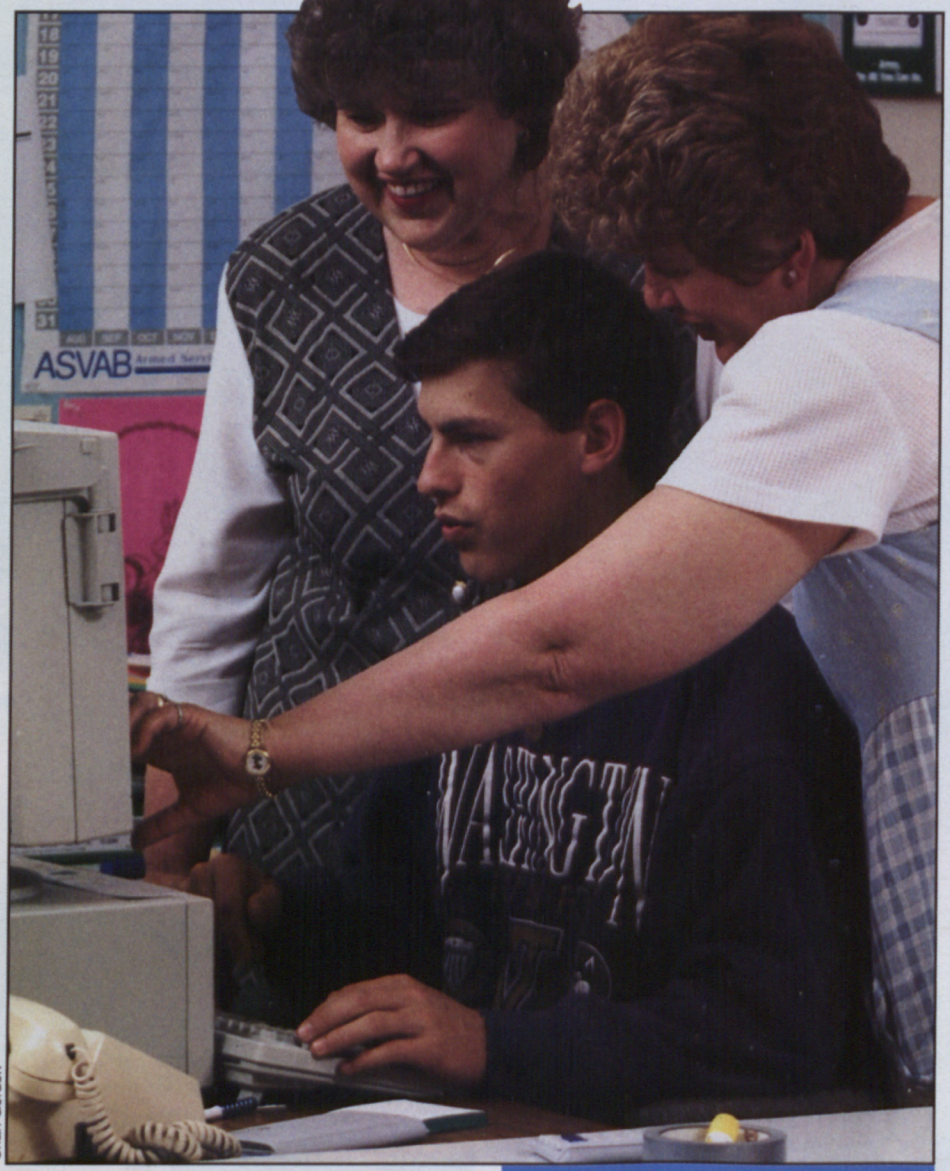
Experiences like these spark students' interest in careers *and* education. "They go out and realize that whatever job they want, academic skills are needed," explains Judy Peterson, the career services specialist at McNary High School in nearby Keizer.

"It's effective no matter which path they're planning to go on, whether to college or straight to work," Peterson adds. "They all need to see the relevance of school to work."

Hardin and Peterson, both members of the Salem-Keizer Association of Classified Employees, are fine-tuning a school-to-work program that involves first giving freshmen or sophomores in their district a self-assessment survey.

During the next year, staffers meet with students individually to look at potential career matches, based on criteria such as interests, salary goals, and the amount of education they're willing to pursue.

Hardin and Peterson then get on the Oregon Job Selection System, a computer database that lets them see what jobs are available and which companies will let a student "shadow" an employee.



Shan Gordon

Oregon career service specialists Judy Peterson (left) and Lynne Hardin help a McNary High School senior gather the information he needs to make an informed choice about life after high school.

As they hone their knowledge, Hardin and Peterson find that they're breaking new ground with their school-to work program.

"We're classified employees," says Peterson, "but we have the knowledge when it comes to school-to-work. People are coming to us for advice on how to make this concept work."

News from other school improvement efforts around the nation:

■ To boost self-confidence and increase the math competency of at-risk students, **North Carolina** teacher assistant Barbara Highsmith organized 18 other assistants this year to launch an

Better Schools

after-school tutoring program.

"With math, many of the students don't have confidence in themselves and say that they can't do it," says Highsmith, a leader of the New Hanover Educational Support Personnel. "But we show them a different way and tell them they can do anything they want to if they try."

The 19 assistants work with 50 students each week at the Gregory School of Science, Mathematics, and Technology.

■ Members of the Irvington (**New Jersey**) Education Association are expanding their partnership with the surrounding school community.

A local restaurant owner recently agreed to support the district's Helping One Student To Succeed (HOSTS) program by encouraging transportation department employees to mentor students. Drivers who attend one training meeting and volunteer two periods per week as mentors get $10 off meals at Don's Diner.

"The program is a win-win for all involved," says Madeline Edwards, IEA president.

Resources

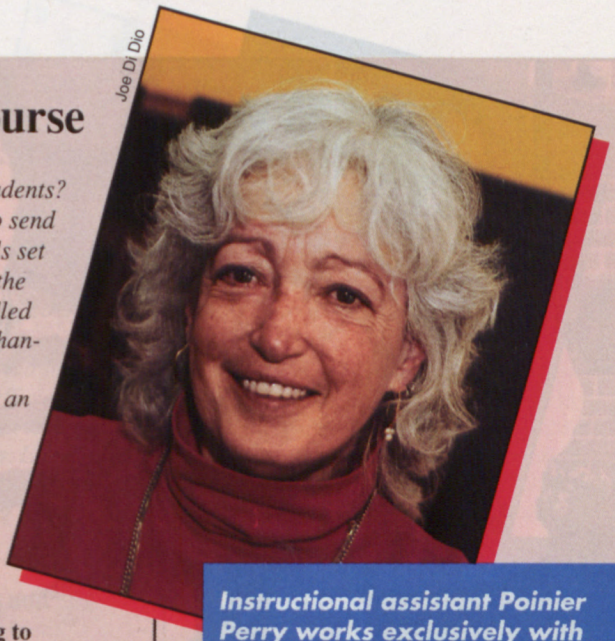
■ For more background on the 1994 School-to-Work Opportunities Act, contact The National School-to-Work Learning & Information Center, 400 Virginia Ave., S.W., Room 210, Washington, DC 20024. E-mail: stw-lc@ed.gov.

■ For guidelines on building your own school-to-work system, check out the Internet (http://www.stw.ed.gov). Or call 800/251-7236.

■ Watch "Better Business, Stronger Schools," a look at a successful school-to-work program at Wake High School in Wendell, North Carolina. This episode of the NEA's new TV series—called "School Stories"—will air on October 20 on the Learning Channel. Check local listings for time.

Alternative Course

How to handle disruptive students? Many districts are looking to send the kids to alternative schools set up just for them. One key to the success of these schools: skilled support employees who can handle the job. For 14 years, Poinier Perry has worked as an instructional assistant at the Gateway School, an alternative school for troubled middle and high school students in Clarksville, Maryland.



Joe Di Dio

Instructional assistant Poinier Perry works exclusively with disruptive students at an alternative school—and loves it.

Q What kinds of problems do your students bring to school?

A You name it—attention disorders, neglect, child abuse, school phobics, truants, drug and alcohol abuse, psychological problems that often require medication.

Q What role do you play in making Gateway work?

A I move from one crisis to another. I'm not assigned to one classroom, and I don't really get to sit and read and help with math—not enough, anyway. Ninety percent of the time I'm taken out of class because something's blown up somewhere.

I also create a safe space for the kids. I'll take them for a timeout, walk around with them outside and let them vent.

Q What would be the ideal setup at an alternative school like yours?

A One aide for every teacher. We wouldn't have as many outbursts, because what I do most of the time is keep kids "in program," help them to stay in control. Assistants are the first line of defense. If situations escalate, then a nurse, psychologist, guidance counselor, or administrator comes in.

Q What makes for a really bad day for you?

A Some people assume that it involves the kids—and yes, there are days when they're bouncing off the walls and you just want to say forget it.

But the worst days are when difficult adult situations arise. One day we had no water and had to try to keep things going while buckets of water were being wheeled into the bathrooms so the toilets could flush. Things like that.

Q So what's great about your job?

A Like most people, I wanted to have an impact. Here I have the opportunity to make a difference to kids who come from some insane situations.

What We Want

Christopher Bell

Standing ready to protect their jobs and their community are (left to right) Decatur, Alabama cafeteria workers and NEA members Ella Dunn, Dianne Brown, Virginia Allen, and Renee Hartley.

Pulling Out The Stops

"I start at 6:30 a.m. to get food ready and take pride in it when I hand it across the counter," says Nancy Garrison, a cafeteria worker at Frances Nungester Elementary School in Decatur, **Alabama**. "It's like serving my family."

So when the school superintendent announced last fall that he was planning to privatize food service, Garrison—who's president of the Education Support Personnel Organization—was appalled.

"These children need to see faces they know," she says, "not minimum wage workers who won't care or won't even be from around here."

Faced with the subcontracting threat, ESPO members swung into gear. The cornerstones of their campaign: research, member involvement, and community outreach.

As a first step, UniServ Director Gloria Johnson collected "horror stories" on two potential bidders—ARAMARK and Marriott—from NEA state and local affiliates in Michigan, New Jersey, and Vermont. One disturbing finding: ARAMARK reheated and recycled food in the Hartland, Michigan school district.

ESPO leaders put this information—including districts, school sites, and dates—on the table during interviews with ARAMARK and Marriott sales reps. Then the Association took its research findings to both the appointed school board and elected public officials.

But the campaign didn't stop there.

Association members reached out to anyone who would listen. They petitioned door to door in 10-degree weather, packed school board meetings, lined up support from the mayor and city council, and invited teachers, state legislators, and representatives from other unions to Association meetings.

The response was overwhelmingly positive. "Even churches were praying for us!" says Garrison.

ESPO's persuasive message: Contractors' low-wage workers couldn't match the hard work and dedication of current employees. Moreover, Decatur would lose state funding through privatization—because Alabama law mandates that state money may pay the salaries only of district employees.

Community pressure, coupled with support from teacher members of the Decatur Education Association, helped ESPO stop subcontracting, Garrison reports—at least for now.

"But we're getting a new elected school board this August," she cautions, "so it's not time to let our guard down. The snake is not dead."

Similar tactics are paying dividends for support employees in other states:

■ Through research and member activism, the Pleasant Valley (**Pennsylvania**) Education Support Personnel Association blocked subcontracting of transportation services—and

Public Jobs for Public Schools

won a pay increase to boot.

When the district claimed in 1993 that it could save $600,000 over three years through subcontracting, bus driver and local Association President Viola Murphy pored through annual financial reports, ledgers, and other documents. She calculated it would be $200,000 cheaper to keep the services in house. In other words, she says, "I called their bluff."

Shortly thereafter, Association members helped elect a new school board and educated the community about the discrepancies. Eventually, the board decided it was more efficient to keep transportation in house—and, last spring, negotiated a 1 percent increase with ESPA members.

"Our community did not want contracted services for our children," concludes Murphy. "Nobody is going to take care of our children better than we do."

■ In **New Jersey**, the Lawrence Township Education Association stopped the subcontracting of 44 custodial jobs by reaching out "big time" to the community. The 400-member local petitioned resi-dents and spoke against privatization dur-ing school board meetings and even back-to-school nights.

The payoff: Last fall, the board agreed to contract language requiring payment of one year's salary to any employee who loses a job through privatization.

Needless to say, Lawrence custodians are still on the job.

Keeping Drivers In the Driver's Seat

Through sharp bargaining, community outreach, and staff unity, the Education Association of Round Lake (Illinois) last year stopped the subcontracting of transportation services. The Association showed that work could be done more efficiently in house, won bus drivers a raise, and protected their benefits. Local President Kim Kearby, a fourth grade teacher, passes along some lessons.

Ken Love

Kim Kearby, a teacher and Association leader, helped stop an Illinois district from subcontracting school bus service.

Q How did you save jobs and win drivers a raise?

We pushed all the buttons we could—including informational picketing, leafleting at bus stops, and getting certified staff to school board meetings.

And we stressed that our driver members live in the community and can do the job more efficiently than outsiders.

Q What role does staff unity play in fighting subcontracting?

A Support employees need to coordinate with certified staff because we're all in this together. It could be the drivers this year, secretaries next year—then who's next?

Q What precautions can support employees take before trouble starts?

A Make sure the community understands that support people live there. Keep accurate records of the little things you do above and beyond the call of duty, like driving home a child who falls asleep on the bus.

It's also important to keep an eye on the budget, to see where your program fits in. Make sure management is running an efficient operation—with no excess.

Q What's the best way to do that?

A Your local needs experts trained in school finance—to track money and know where costs are. Right now, we have 92 students bused by private firms. Our support staff leader, Martin Irish, and the bargaining committee are researching how to get them back on district buses.

Privatization: Online Resources

NEA Online offers a host of new resources to help support employees fight contracting out. For a free NEA Online starter kit, call 800/781-5577. For more information on the NEA ESP Information System—which makes sharing news easy—see page 44.

■ For contractors' corporate profiles, tips on fighting subcontracting, and sample union contract language on privatization, go to NEA Online's *ESP and Contracting Out* area (keyword: NEA Contracting) on America Online.

■ To compare notes on subcontracting with other ESP members, post a message in the "ESP Contracting Out" folder of NEA Online's *Constituency Message Board.*

■ To order the NEA manual *Contracting Out: Strategies for Fighting Back* (stock #1879-6), call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200. The price: $2.95 for members, $9.95 for non-members. A shipping and handling charge will be added to each order.

What We Want

Election Day Turnaround

Things were looking bad for school support employees in Pueblo, Colorado District #70 last year.

Their superintendent was domineering, ignored community input, and supported budget cuts in all the wrong places. They hadn't had a raise in four years. The school board didn't recognize the Association of Classified Employees as their union. And, to top it off, their local president, elementary media tech JoAnn Falk, was fired on trumped up charges.

The solution: elect friends of education to the local school board.

ACE members—95 percent of whom live in the district—got busy. When two seats opened up, they backed the candidacies of two parents with children in their schools. Both vowed, if elected, to vote for formal recognition of the Association.

ACE members then fanned out to campaign in a geographical area the size of Rhode Island.

They made phone and house calls. They dropped leaflets at 10,000 households in one day alone! They introduced candidates to voters at community coffees and public events, and placed nine-foot-long campaign signs in strategic locations—like across the street from the district administration building.

The payoff: Last November, ACE-backed candidates Marcia Bacino and John Mooring won with 70 percent of the vote and joined a third board member to form a new majority.

At its first meeting, the new board reinstated Falk. In February, the board voted to recognize the union. Both parties are now in bargaining over the support staffers' first contract.

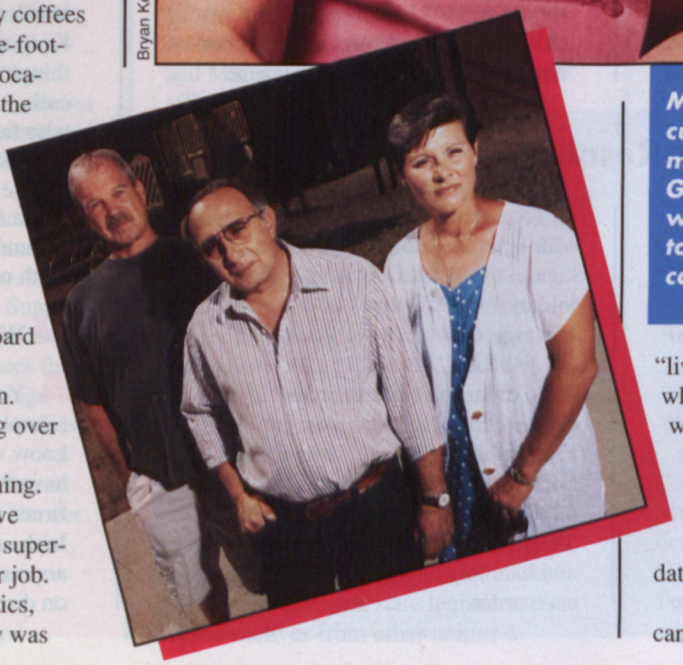
And there's been a house cleaning. Two associate superintendents have resigned from the district, and the superintendent has moved on to another job.

Falk, a 35-year veteran of politics, stresses that the key to this victory was "living here in the community, knowing which people to talk to, and doing a whole lot of work.

"If you pull together as a team, you can do it," she concludes. "If the majority of employees are behind you and you can find supportive candidates to campaign for, go for it!"

Here's more proof that political action can turn things around:

Bryan Kelson



Media tech JoAnn Falk (above), custodian Tom Rhodes (left), maintenance employee Fredrick Granato, and food service worker Debra Sperry pulled together to elect friends of education to the local school board.

Political Muscle

■ By packing hearings and deluging lawmakers with phone calls and mail, **Ohio** Education Association members—including support staffers—helped bury a legislative scheme that could have meant a higher retirement age and a benefits cut.

The pension issue—along with medical insurance, school bus safety/driver liability, and health and safety enforcement—are top concerns of Ohio support employees, reports Chuck Gibson, a member of OEA's watchdog Legislative Commission.

Gibson, a maintenance-custodial unit supervisor for Xenia City Schools, says too often support staffers "feel they don't have the education, experience, and knowledge to be active politically—when, in reality, they have it all."

■ In **Washington**, support and teacher members of the Spokane Education Association are gearing up to defeat November ballot initiatives creating private school vouchers and authorizing "independent" (charter) public schools—without employment guarantees for support staffers.

SEA Classified Commission member Joe Ramos, an instructional assistant at Lewis and Clark High School, reports his local is "mobilizing ESPs to get informed and educated" on these initiatives and urging them to "talk to neighbors" about the need to defeat them.

Getting Started

Here's how you can help elect friends of education:

■ Learn who represents you—from school board members up to members of Congress.
■ Read candidates' voting records and see how they address ESP issues.
■ Find out which candidates are recommended by your state Association.
■ Make sure all your co-workers know who the recommended candidates are—and be certain that *anybody* you can influence knows who you're voting for.

Election Year Advocate

"I wish politicians who attended public schools would say it, not whisper it," says Iona Holloway, a classroom aide at La Place Elementary School, La Place, Louisiana. Holloway, immediate past president of the St. John Association of Educators, was elected to serve as a delegate at this year's Democratic National Convention. Rest assured, she wasn't elected to whisper.

John Ballance

Iona Holloway, last year's NEA Support Person of the Year, was elected to push education issues at the Democratic National Convention this summer.

Q What will your agenda be as a convention delegate?

A To help kids. I'm going as a public school employee committed to public schools for all of America's children. And I want to make sure those schools remain public.

It is imperative that the federal government provide aid for these schools. My district is poor. It "stacks 'em deep and teaches 'em cheap."

There are a lot of federal mandates, and we're hurting trying to keep up with them.

Q You make $10,300—after 19 years on the job. What will you tell politicians about the need for a minimum wage hike?

A People who make beaucoup money could not live on what I make. But we take the pay, work hard, and improve our wages and working conditions through organizations like NEA. When you give someone the opportunity to earn more, they'll produce more, and buy more bread and soap—and create a market to hire another person.

Q How will you get your point across?

A I'll have my facts straight, speak from the heart, and talk till somebody listens, one person at a time. When people know what you stand for, they will listen.

Q What are the stakes in this year's Presidential election?

A America is at stake. We need to get out there to make sure that America remains a viable player in the world. We need to educate our children to be ready for the next century, and the only way is through public schools—because that's where the majority of children are.

What We Want

Mastering The Tasks At Hand

Maintenance workers in Orange County, **Florida** schools can now enroll in a 64-week training course that provides them with advanced skills, a bigger paycheck, and, in the end, job protection.

The program was established by the workers' own union—the Orange Educational Support Personnel Association—working with the school district.

OESPA's goal: to provide the best service to school districts and students, while at the same time boosting the professional skills—and compensation—of its members.

"This program rewards competence," says OESPA President Steve Anderson. "Once you're trained to do the job, you're going to be paid to do it."

Once maintenance workers finish the course, they automatically receive the title "facilities maintenance technician master"—and move up eight grades on the pay scale.

That equation didn't develop overnight. Several years ago, OESPA members, teachers, and administrators realized that site-based maintenance was the most efficient way to service its 150 schools. They then developed a structure that divided the district into 13 zones, each with a lead person, a core of skilled tradespeople, and a maintenance person for each site.

Once this system was running smoothly, OESPA surveyed people at each level, asking them what skills they needed to get up to speed. OESPA then worked with a district vo-tech school to develop a training program to meet those needs.

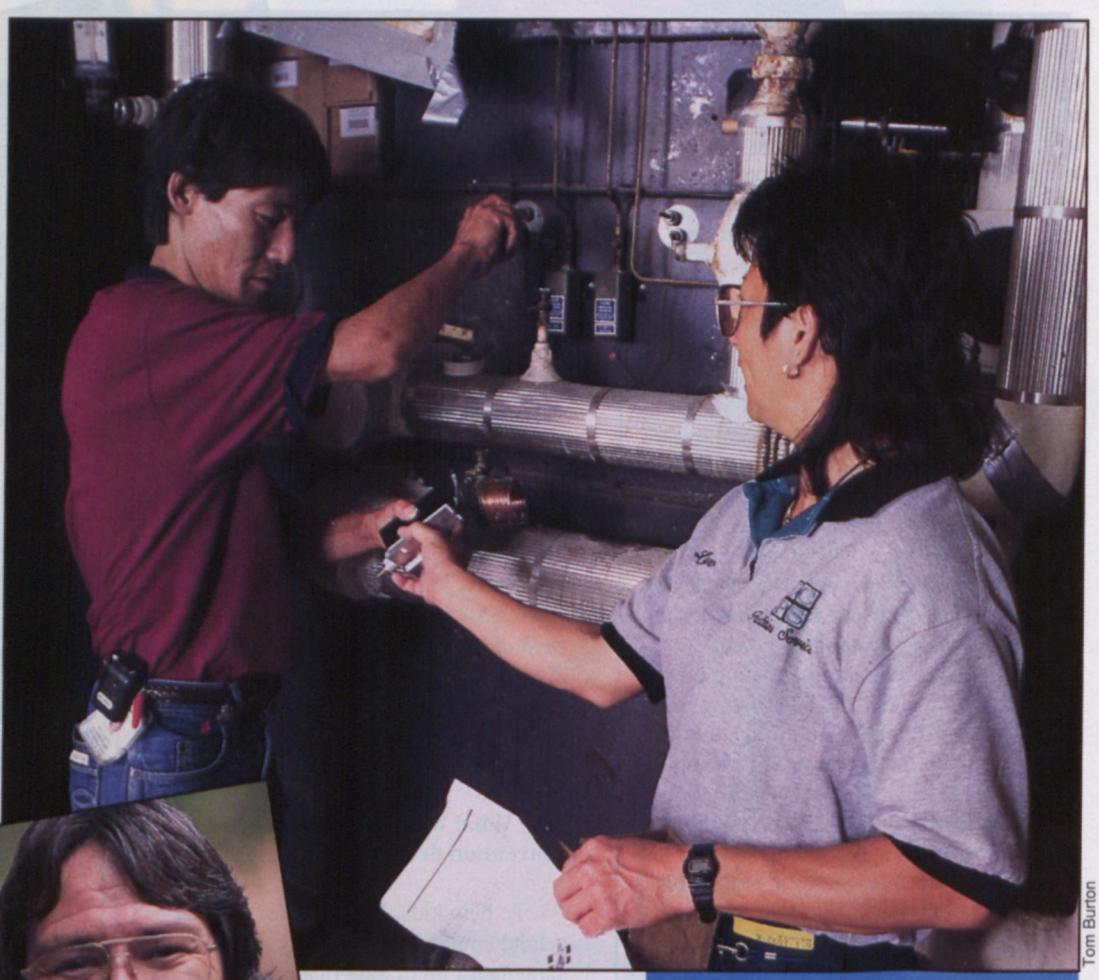
"The school district loves it," says Anderson. "They get competent maintenance people trained around the specific needs of school sites in Orange County"—a district with a wide range of old and new buildings.

The training also provides members a certain level of job security, he adds. "This program says to prospective subcontractors, 'Can your employees, dollar for dollar, meet the specific requirements that our work force can?'

"It puts the onus on the contractor to meet our standards, not the other way around," Anderson concludes. "We can stand up to contractors and say 'you have to compete.' That keeps us from getting sold out."

Around the country, training's a hot topic:

■ In Clark County, **Nevada**, the Education Support Employees



Tom Burton

Facility maintenance technicians Les Ehama (left) and Lynn Concepcion teamed with Orange County, Florida Association leader Steve Anderson (inset) to push for a 64-week training course for maintenance workers.

Professional Development

Association helped members advance professionally at its annual Leadership Training Day. "We offered classes to get them to their next step, gave them their certificate, and they advanced," says coordinator Linda Gingras, office manager in the southeast area superintendent's office.

CPR/first aid courses—which are required of all assistant school nurses but not provided or paid for by the district—were available for a nominal fee. "Members thought it was magnificent," says Gingras.

Training Tips

Katie Stout, a staff member at the Wisconsin Education Association Council, offers the following tips for employees pursuing professional development issues.

- Bargain for time and pay for professional development activities. It's a good investment for your district.
- Organize staff development activities as part of your monthly or annual Association meetings.
- Don't hesitate to join in on teacher professional development activities. Remember, you are working with the same children.
- Create a plan for your own professional development. Identify skills you need to pick up—and brush up.
- Tell your supervisor and Association representative that you're interested in professional development, so they can pass fliers on to you when they get them.
- Keep records of your professional development activities. They may come in handy at evaluation time or when you're ready for a promotion.

One Step Ahead

Joyce Jones, a school secretary at Irving Pertzsch Elementary in Onalaska, Wisconsin, worked for two years to develop an official training program for support staff in her state. Upon completion, participants receive an official ESP certificate issued by the Wisconsin Education Association's Professional Development Academy.

WEAC

Wisconsin secretary Joyce Jones has been instrumental in establishing an official training program just for education support employees.

Q What inspired you to spearhead the development of this program?

A We are called on to handle all kinds of situations—tend to sick and injured children, calm irate parents, administer medications, defuse tense situations, make judgment calls in emergency situations, and be a jack-of-all-trades.

I feel strongly that the support personnel in our schools need training in their fields. If they had training, they would be better informed and more confident in their abilities.

Q What do employees have to do earn an ESP certificate?

A They must earn five credits in each of four core areas—communications in the workplace, behavior management strategies, human growth and development, and rights and responsibilities under state and federal law.

Then they must earn 10 credits in elective areas applicable to their job categories. For example, one of the courses we offered was "The Aides' Role in Developing Successful Readers."

Finally, they must earn five credits in either core or elective areas. We're hoping to award our first certificate sometime in the upcoming year.

Q How did folks decide what the requirements would be?

A We worked with the University of Wisconsin to develop the curriculum and requirements. Most of the training programs are operated through the University.

Q How much does it cost to participate, and who pays?

A Overall expenses vary, course to course. In Onalaska, the district covers the cost of the courses and provides comp time for attendance. That's what they do for teachers, so that's what they said they'd do for us.

Q Does this certificate translate into a bigger paycheck?

A I hope the value of an ESP certificate will be recognized. At the least, the certificate should improve a person's chance of being promoted.

Bus Safety Takes Center Stage

Michigan bus driver Peggy Watkins walks around an audience of young students with Buster, the miniature talking bus. While he pops wheelies and blinks his eyes, she asks him questions about bus safety.

Then Safety Dog, a hand-puppet, makes his entrance. He's been sent by the head hound dog of Houndstown to get safety tips for the hounds. Tape recorder in hand, he asks the kids to tell him the rules they've learned.

Maria, a puppet and bus rider, explains what it's like to ride the school bus each morning. Eventually, the drivers themselves get into the act. They play the roles of typical problem student riders like the kid who runs up and down the aisle, the bully, and the one who's habitually late.

Welcome to school bus safety instruction, Reeths-Puffer district style.

The brains behind the scenes are, of course, the drivers themselves—all members of the Reeths-Puffer-ESP (CMTFS). They developed the concept, then applied for and won a $36,000 Michigan Highway Safety Planning grant to fund the program, which has been operating for the past three years.

"We wanted to help the kids be responsible bus riders," says Watkins, "for their own sakes *and* to make our jobs easier. And we decided a little drama was not only a fun way to show them how but also the best way to help them remember."

The drivers present the skits as many as 15 times at the beginning of each school year.

Prior to each performance, they set up the sound equipment, put together the sets, and arrange the chairs like seats on a bus for their young audiences, 60 kids at a time, ranging in age from four to 12.

Then, armed with the hand puppets and the remote controlled bus, they take center stage to teach how important it is to always cross the street 15 feet in front of the bus, to always remain seated when the bus is moving, to keep one's feet on the floor at all times, and to stand in line while waiting to board the bus.

"Not only do the kids learn about bus safety from these presentations," says Watkins, "they also see that we drivers are just ordinary people who care very much about them."

Bob Chase

Michigan bus drivers (left to right) Peggy Watkins, Kathy Peterson, Sheryl Dykstra, and Sherry Hecox use puppets to teach kids about safety.

Safe Schools

Finding a Cure For Sick Buildings

So many health problems began surfacing at Absegami High School in Atlantic County, New Jersey that staff members formed a health and safety committee to look into the causes. School secretary Catherine Coletta, president of the Oakcrest-Absegami Employees Association, was one of several support workers and teachers on the committee.

Q What were some of the health problems?

A Staff members reported headaches, nausea, fatigue, urinary tract infections, dizziness, and a feeling of "suffocation" in their rooms.

From talking with students, support staff also had concerns about student health. Teachers noticed that students in morning classes performed better than those in afternoon classes, and that students had an unusually high number of stomach problems.

I joined the health and safety committee because I knew support staff had problems, and I wanted to be sure their complaints were heard and noted.

Q What did the committee do?

A For two years, we recorded all complaints and brought the reports to the attention of school board members at their monthly meetings. As the complaints continued to roll in, the board hired an environmental consulting and management company to test the quality of the air inside the school.

The tests showed that levels of mold and bacteria exceeded standards set by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration and that carbon monoxide levels were high. This meant that breathing our school's air was hazardous to everyone's health.

Q Did the board act on the consultant's report?

Rachelle Omenson

Catherine Coletta, a school secretary in Atlantic County, New Jersey, fights to improve indoor air quality at her school.

A Yes. Last summer, our school was placed on a three-year plan to improve its indoor air. Old copy machines are now being replaced, air filters are being changed, ventilation is being increased, duct work is being chemically washed, and the roof is being repaired.

We had a problem that wasn't going to go away. It was a very important issue because it involved everyone's health. So we knew we had to act. It took two years, but our efforts have paid off.

Q What advice would you give to members in schools or districts facing similar problems?

A Pull together. Organize. Be persistent. We got results—and I don't think our administration is any more or less difficult than most.

Toward a Safer Environment

■ Have questions about helping medically fragile kids? Check out *Providing Safe Health Care: The Role of Educational Support Personnel* (stock number 1876-1-10-C8). Special NEA member price: $4.45, plus s&h. To order, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

■ For solutions to many school health problems, look to *The Healthy School Handbook: Conquering the Sick Building Syndrome and Other Environmental Hazards In and Around Your School* (stock number 1863-X-20-C8). Special member price: $21.95, plus s&h. To order, call the NEA Professional Library at 800/229-4200.

■ To find out if your school's air quality is up to snuff, get the *Indoor Air Quality Tools for Schools* kit. The kit, produced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and cosponsored by NEA, contains materials to help diagnose problems, then design and carry out practical, low-cost remedies.

To order a kit (order number 055-000-00503-6), send a check for $22 made out to Superintendent of Documents, to Superintendent of Documents, P.O. Box 371954, Pittsburgh, PA 15250.

■ For a free packet of materials on indoor air quality—"IAQ and You"—write to the NEA Health Information Network, 1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, DC 20036.

What We Want

Bringing Unity To the Table

"Divide and conquer is a big thing here," notes **Vermont** audiovisual coordinator and Association activist Cheryl Currier.

So big, in fact, that management was counting on support staff-teacher divisiveness to win union concessions on benefits, rights, and paid leave.

So big that management hoped to use the tactic to force support staffers into a medical plan with such high co-pays and deductibles that, Currier says, "it would actually cost *us* to work here."

But the 105 members of the North Country Union High School Education Association—custodians, maintenance workers, drivers, secretaries, paraprofessionals, and teachers—had a not-so-secret weapon. Call it solidarity.

In this local, teachers and support staffers sit on one bargaining team, which negotiates both units' contracts on an alternating basis. "This way, there's continuity of knowledge, and the school board can't pull the wool over our eyes," Currier points out.

When management imposed a contract on teachers that gutted language on everything from class size to health and safety, the teachers voted to strike—with full support from support staffers.

And when support staffers faced the threat of takeaways, teachers backed their cause. In the end, support staffers and management reached a settlement first—without takebacks—and teachers signed a contract a month later that restored everything that had been lost.

"Unity is the big thing," stresses Currier. "We all have a common interest and present a common front to the school board. It can't manipulate between the two groups because we support one another. We are awesome, because everybody respects everybody else."

Staff unity is a factor in other recent ESP contracts:

■ In a four-year agreement reached last fall in Fowlerville, **Michigan**, support employees won the same benefits as teachers—including dental and vision coverage. In addition, all Fowlerville Education Association members—teachers, aides, secretaries, and transportation and food service employees—won a first-year increase of 3 percent.

In each of the following years, 70 percent of state "catch-up" per-pupil grants will be dedicated to employee compensation (for a minimum raise of 1 percent and a maximum of 3.5 percent), while 30 percent will go to programs that directly benefit students.

The contract allows the district to use its 30 percent share to "make our working conditions better—through more supplies, fewer students per class, and cleaner buildings and grounds," says teacher negotiator George Macklem.

■ During contract talks with the Fort Campbell (**Kentucky**) Non-Certified Education Association, management maintained that giving support employees a bigger raise than certified employees "would cause conflict and

At North Country Union High School in Vermont, teachers and support employees stick together. Left to right: activists Lisa Grout, Mona Lewis, Cheryl Currier, and Allen Grout. The Grouts are both teachers.

Alden Pellett

Good Contracts

morale problems with teachers," recalls local President Al Dyer.

But this spring, when a federal arbitrator awarded support employees a 10 percent raise—retroactive to October 1—"teachers were happy for us and said it was about time," Dyer says. "They appreciate the support staff more than management realizes."

The arbitration award, which covers some 200 support employees of the U.S. Army's Fort Campbell Dependents Schools, also institutes three paid personal days for seasonal employees, as well as longevity and severance pay.

Dyer, a maintenance worker, reports that his diverse bargaining committee—himself, an educational aide, a custodian, and a secretary—"did a lot of hard work with the facts," documenting a pay disparity with other support staff on base and at Fort Knox, 100 miles away. "Research is the thing" that made the Association's case for a decent increase, he stresses.

Resources

When you need advice at the bargaining table, look no further than your own computer—and the modem that can connect you to Association activists around the country. For a free NEA Online starter kit, call 800/781-5577. Once you're on board, you can:

- Post a message in the "Contract Issues" and "Negotiations" folders of NEA Online's *Local Leader Message Board* (keyword: NEA Local).
- Subscribe to NEA's Internet mailing list for ESPs. Send an E-mail to **majordomo@cet.nea.org**, leave the subject line blank, and write SUBSCRIBE ESP in the text box.
- Download Maine ESP sample contract language from NEA Online's *Constituency Library*. You'll find it in the *NEA Constituency Groups* area.

Speaking for Everybody

In Alamogordo, New Mexico, warehouse worker Joseph Carlos Piedra speaks for both classified and certified school employees at the bargaining table.

Angie Meck

Joseph Carlos Piedra is the vice president and chief bargaining spokesperson of NEA-Alamogordo—a local of both teachers and support employees.

Q What do you say to teachers who think you don't understand their issues?

A There are three certified people on our six-member bargaining team: an elementary teacher, a secondary teacher, and a certified librarian. They normally work with teachers' problems, and we all brainstorm and work together as a team. Staff unity means we're all in the same boat together—and our strength comes from our numbers.

Q Are numbers critical?

A It's harder to get what we want in bargaining if, say, seven out of 15 people in maintenance are union members. The district will say, "Only 50 percent of your people are in the union. You only talk to union members."

But when you have a 100 percent union shop, you can say, "This is what maintenance people *want*." You'll get more with that 800-pound gorilla than with a 200-pound monkey.

Q What's your current bargaining relationship with the district?

A We use interest-based bargaining. Both teams put out ideas, interests, and options, and do a little brainstorming. We've formed a council—two people from the district and two from the union—that has resolved some issues.

Q So how's everything working out?

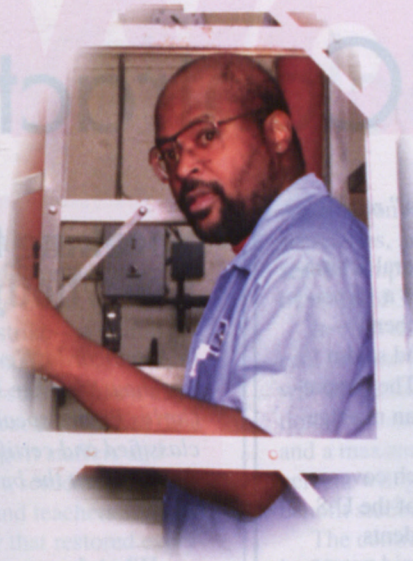
A Well, the district still blames everything on NEA, like the long school calendar—which we didn't negotiate. This undermines the whole concept of interest-based bargaining. We also have a lack of consistent communications from the district and administrators who pull employees in for interrogation.

Q What are you doing to address all this?

A We're working to streamline the grievance procedure and get an employee's right to union representation during questioning into the contract. We also have more member organizing to do.

"The computer is a tool that more and more people are using. I enjoy the networking that you can do in cyberspace."

—Tim Smith, custodian
Southfield, Michigan



Get Connected!

For Tim Smith, the possibilities of cyberspace are endless.

Smith, a head custodian in Southfield, Michigan, enjoys the "networking that you can do with a computer and a modem." Explains this Michigan NEA activist: "It's nothing to E-mail someone in California and forward that message to someone in Florida. And it's less expensive than a phone call or a fax."

Now you can join Tim Smith—and NEA education support members throughout the United States—in cyberspace. If you have access to a computer and a modem, you have all you need to network yourself into the new NEA ESP Internet mailing list.

This new NEA ESP mailing list makes it easy for support staffers to share news and views. "Can you imagine," Tim Smith asks, "having information right in front of you on a company that's trying to take over your school district?"

To subscribe to the ESP mailing list, send an E-mail to **majordomo@cet.nea.org**, leave the subject line blank, and write SUBSCRIBE ESP in the text box.

The ESP mailing list is part of NEA's new ESP Information System, a decentralized communications network that helps ESPs—and Association staff—exchange information on issues like contracting out, collaborative bargaining, political action, and organizing.

Besides the ESP mailing list, the ESP Information System now offers a wealth of information on NEA Online, the special service for NEA members that appears on America Online, the nation's largest cyberspace service. You'll find online excerpts from the ESP Data Book, ideas on fighting privatization (including a manual and company profiles), model ESP contract language, as well as online message boards dedicated to discussions about fighting contracting out. For a free NEA Online starter kit, call 800/781-5577.

For more information about the ESP Information System, contact:

Roxanne Dove
ESP Program Coordinator
NEA-Constituent Group Relations
1201 16th St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036
E-mail: rdove@nea.org

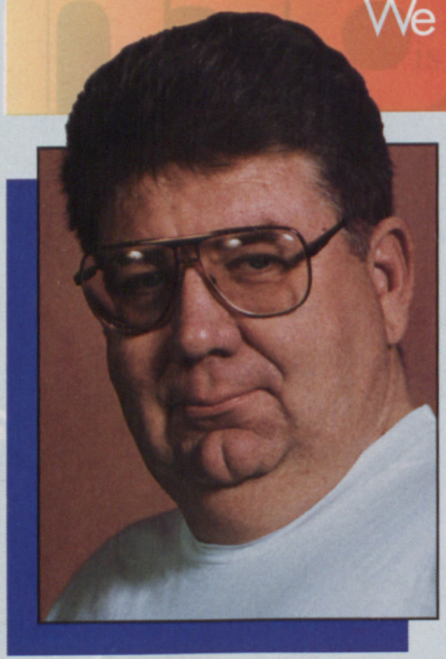
Finally: A Network for Us
NEA's ESP Information System

What We Earn

Head custodian Dominick Barone's got the keys to an Arizona middle school—but he's not laughing all the way to the bank. Find out how your paycheck stacks up.

Don Stevenson

What We Earn



- **Name:** Jack Mize
- **Local Association, state:** Indiana State Teachers Association (individual member)
- **Years of service:** 16
- **Current pay:** $15.80 an hour, about 30 hours a week for 9 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** A '92 Dodge Dynasty and some farm equipment.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Really, I don't have too many worries. Retirement's a concern since we don't have a pension plan now—but we hope to get one soon.
- **Best part of the job:** I enjoy working with the special ed children. I have always said that no matter how we feel, those poor little kids come on the bus with a smile, so what have we got to complain about?
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** Although I don't mind being tested for drugs and alcohol, it's becoming a hassle. Every time you turn around, it's either drug tests or physicals.
- **Dream job:** I think I'm in it. I've always wanted to drive a special ed bus.
- **I think I'm worth:** At least $2 to $3 an hour more. I took my car in today, and my auto mechanic gets $42 an hour.

Photographs on pages 46-55 by Eileen Conners

BUS DRIVERS

National Average Hourly Wage, 1995-96 . . . . . $11.04
National Average Hourly Wage, 1994-95 . . . . . $10.69
Percent Salary Increase 3.3%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

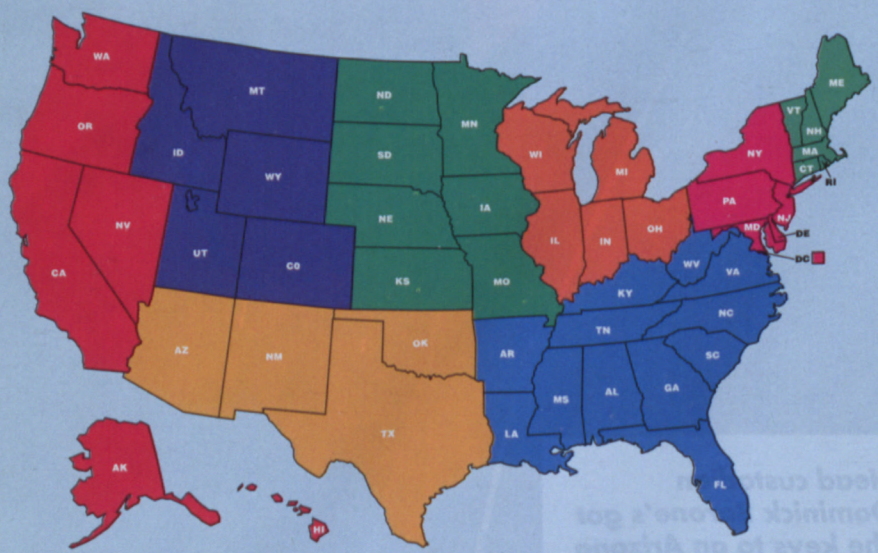
300 to 2,499	$10.86
2,500 to 9,999	$11.37
10,000 to 24,999	$10.84
25,000 or more	$10.88

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$10.40
$4,500 to $4,999	$10.55
$5,000 to $5,999	$10.86
$6,000 to $6,999	$10.75
$7,000 or more	$12.57

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$11.19
Mideast	$12.68
Southeast	$10.13
Great Lakes	$11.87
Plains	$9.94
Southwest	$9.36
Rocky Mountains	$9.67
Far West	$12.08



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What We Earn

- **Name:** Loriann Darrell
- **Local Association, state:** Springfield Support Staff Association, Vermont
- **Years of service:** 9
- **Current pay:** $9.17 an hour, 32.5 hours a week for 9 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** A '94 Dodge Caravan.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Job security. With the budget problems we're having, anyone could lose a job.
- **Best part of the job:** I like working with the kids and the people in my building. I work in a small alternative school, so there's more chance to get to know people.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** I just love my job. I wouldn't change anything. Maybe, I'd increase training opportunities for the staff.
- **Dream job:** One where I travel a lot.
- **I think I'm worth:** I'm pretty happy with what I'm getting paid. I think I get a fair salary, considering the benefits I get and the region I live in.

INSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANTS

National Average Hourly Wage, 1995-96 .....$9.04
National Average Hourly Wage, 1994-95 .....$8.77
Percent Salary Increase 3.1%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

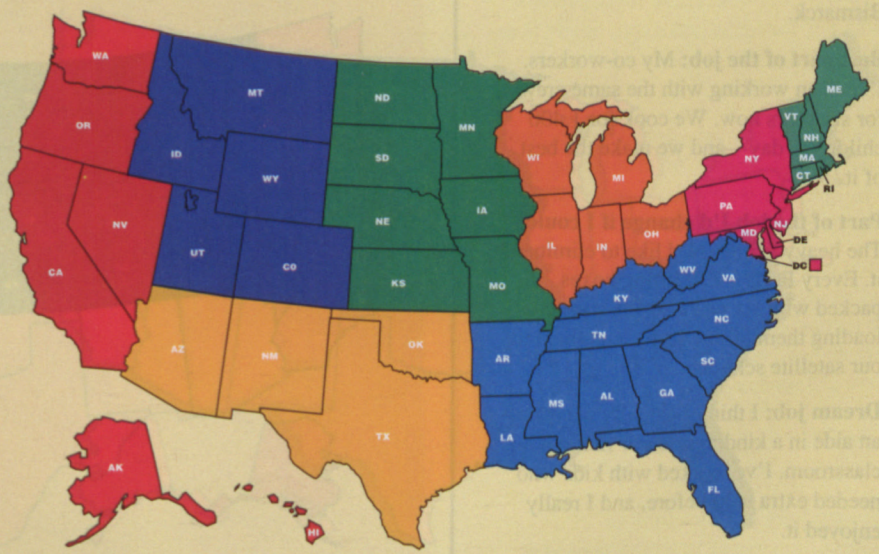
300 to 2,499	$8.67
2,500 to 9,999	$9.05
10,000 to 24,999	$9.16
25,000 or more	$9.41

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$8.46
$4,500 to $4,999	$8.48
$5,000 to $5,999	$8.54
$6,000 to $6,999	$9.28
$7,000 or more	$10.41

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$9.80
Mideast	$9.97
Southeast	$8.35
Great Lakes	$9.18
Plains	$7.80
Southwest	$8.40
Rocky Mountains	$7.29
Far West	$9.89



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What We Earn

- **Name:** Kathy Pittman
- **Local Association, state:** Mandan Education Association, North Dakota
- **Years of service:** 15
- **Current pay:** $8.05 an hour, 33 hours a week for 9 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** A motorboat.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Getting my daughter through college. She's a junior now at the University of Mary in Bismarck.
- **Best part of the job:** My co-workers. I've been working with the same crew for six years now. We cook for 1,400 children a day—and we make the best of it.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** The heavy lifting—I'd like to eliminate it. Every Friday, I'm lifting boxes packed with six of those #10 cans and loading them on trucks to send them to our satellite schools.
- **Dream job:** I think I'd really like to be an aide in a kindergarten or first grade classroom. I've worked with kids who needed extra help before, and I really enjoyed it.
- **I think I'm worth:** At least $10 an hour. But what I want most is equity. We're all there for children, so we should all be treated equally.

CAFETERIA WORKERS

National Average Hourly Wage, 1995-96 ..... $8.15
National Average Hourly Wage, 1994-95 ..... $7.89
Percent Salary Increase 3.3%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

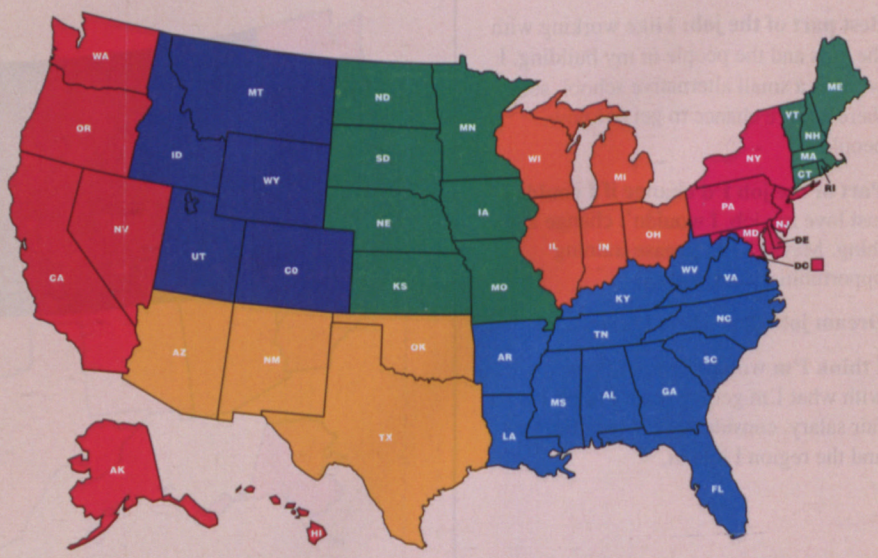
300 to 2,499	$7.89
2,500 to 9,999	$8.28
10,000 to 24,999	$8.21
25,000 or more	$8.20

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$7.97
$4,500 to $4,999	$7.57
$5,000 to $5,999	$7.91
$6,000 to $6,999	$8.32
$7,000 or more	$8.91

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$8.70
Mideast	$8.68
Southeast	$7.61
Great Lakes	$8.31
Plains	$7.48
Southwest	$7.26
Rocky Mountains	$7.60
Far West	$9.02



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What We Earn

- **Name:** Jeanette Perry
- **Local Association, state:** Volusia Association of Educational Office Personnel, Florida
- **Years of service:** 24
- **Current pay:** $22,300 for 12 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** Installation of central air conditioning and heating in my house.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Being able to meet the mortgage payments.
- **Best part of the job:** I like helping to put student records on microfilm. I like what I do, and I like the people I work with.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** I don't like to make corrections in the computer printout—it's very time consuming.
- **Dream job:** I'd like to do more work with computers. Right now, I'm learning some of the Microsoft programs, and I'd like to learn more.
- **I think I'm worth:** $35,000 to $40,000.

CENTRAL OFFICE SECRETARIES

National Average Salary, 1995-96 ..... $24,809
National Average Salary, 1994-95 ..... $23,935
Percent Salary Increase 3.7%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

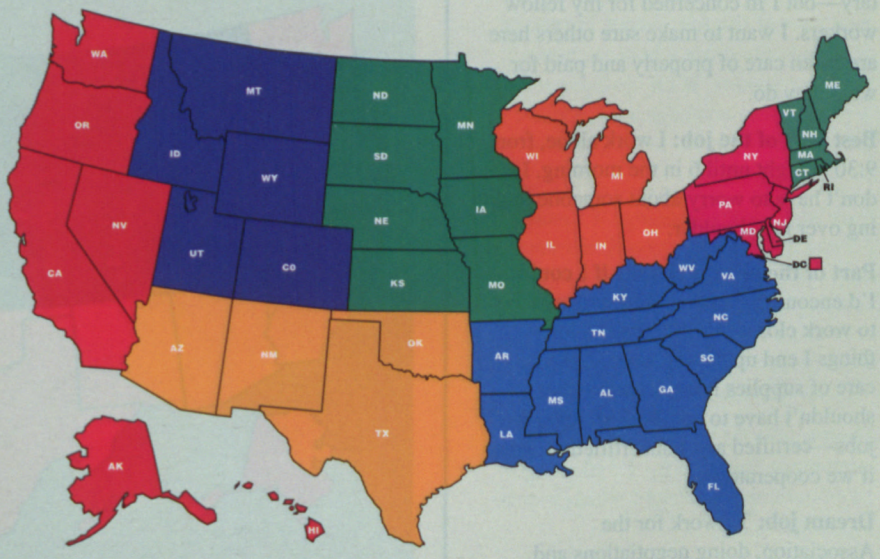
300 to 2,499	$24,267
2,500 to 9,999	$25,394
10,000 to 24,999	$24,562
25,000 or more	$24,628

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$23,815
$4,500 to $4,999	$23,394
$5,000 to $5,999	$23,717
$6,000 to $6,999	$24,975
$7,000 or more	$27,858

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$27,155
Mideast	$27,170
Southeast	$21,936
Great Lakes	$25,695
Plains	$20,754
Southwest	$21,483
Rocky Mountains	$21,777
Far West	$29,188



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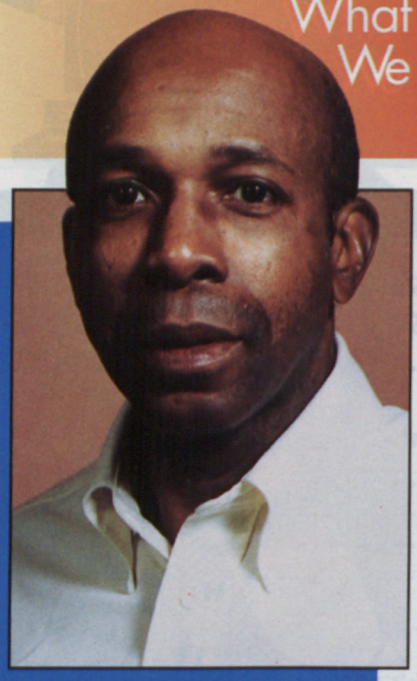
What We Earn



- **Name:** Willie E. Battle, Jr.
- **Local Association, state:** Fort Campbell Noncertified Education Association, Kentucky
- **Years of service:** 4
- **Current pay:** $7.78 an hour, 40 hours a week for 12 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** A house in '92.
- **Biggest financial worry:** I have another income—I put in 30 years in the military—but I'm concerned for my fellow workers. I want to make sure others here are taken care of properly and paid for what they do.
- **Best part of the job:** I work alone, from 9:30 at night until 6 in the morning. I don't have to worry about someone looking over my shoulder.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** I'd encourage support staff and teachers to work closer together. I see a lot of things I end up having to do—like taking care of supplies lying around—that I shouldn't have to do. We can make both jobs—certified and noncertified—easier if we cooperate.
- **Dream job:** To work for the Association, doing negotiations and working on contracts and grievances.
- **I think I'm worth:** At least $10 an hour.

CUSTODIANS

National Average Hourly Wage, 1995-96 . . . . . $10.35
National Average Hourly Wage, 1994-95 . . . . . $10.05
Percent Salary Increase 3.0%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

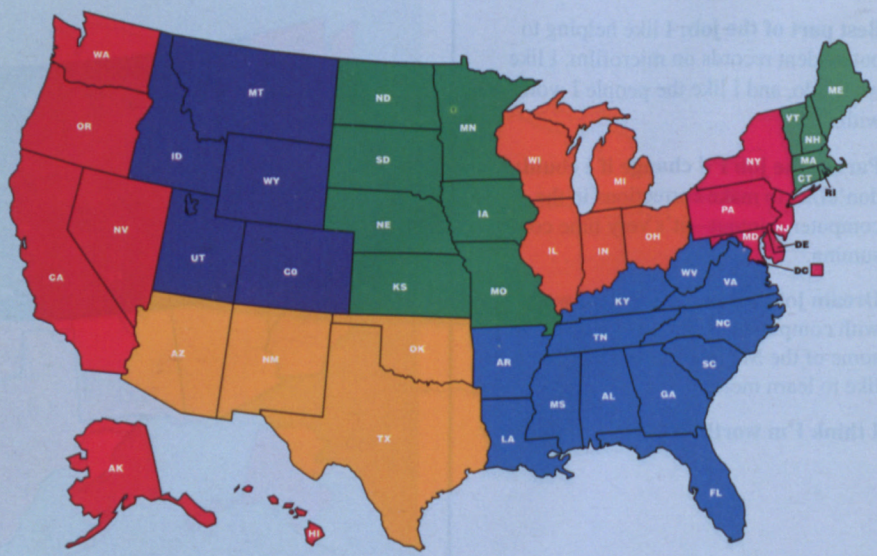
300 to 2,499	$10.05
2,500 to 9,999	$10.81
10,000 to 24,999	$10.36
25,000 or more	$9.61

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$9.64
$4,500 to $4,999	$9.15
$5,000 to $5,999	$9.81
$6,000 to $6,999	$10.39
$7,000 or more	$12.29

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$11.96
Mideast	$11.55
Southeast	$8.12
Great Lakes	$11.78
Plains	$9.04
Southwest	$7.95
Rocky Mountains	$9.37
Far West	$11.64



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What We Earn

- **Name:** Linda Coleman
- **Local Association, state:** Fairfield County ESP, South Carolina
- **Years of service:** 14
- **Current pay:** $18,500 for 12 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** A '93 Escort.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Having enough money to be able to afford a decent retirement.
- **Best part of the job:** The school atmosphere and the comaraderie of the staff here at the vocational school.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** Right now, I'm the bookkeeper and the secretary—and at times it's overwhelming. There's just too much work and not enough time.
- **Dream job:** To open up my own arts and crafts business.
- **I think I'm worth:** $28,000.

BUILDING SECRETARIES

National Average Salary, 1995-96 . . . . . $20,076
National Average Salary, 1994-95 . . . . . $19,170
Percent Salary Increase 4.7%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

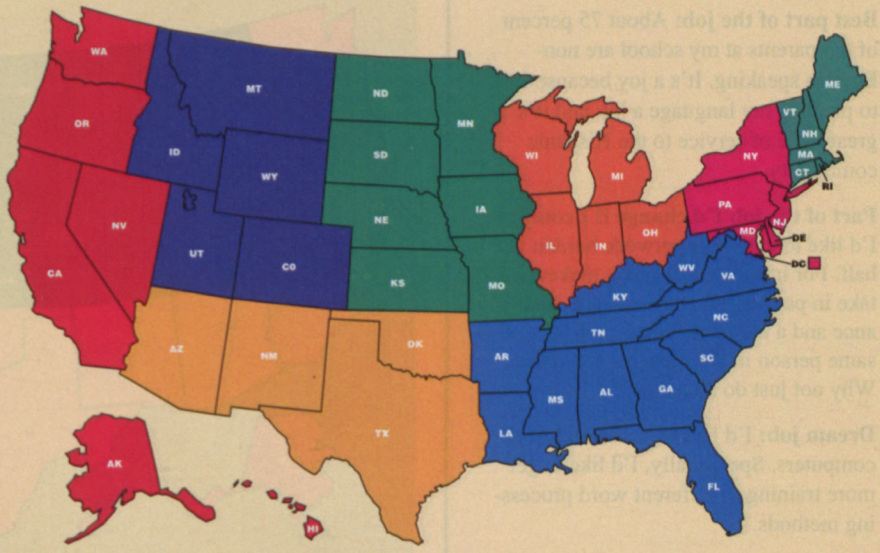
300 to 2,499	$18,688
2,500 to 9,999	$20,251
10,000 to 24,999	$20,317
25,000 or more	$21,679

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$19,275
$4,500 to $4,999	$19,170
$5,000 to $5,999	$18,814
$6,000 to $6,999	$19,802
$7,000 or more	$23,050

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$21,009
Mideast	$22,518
Southeast	$18,564
Great Lakes	$19,018
Plains	$16,610
Southwest	$18,208
Rocky Mountains	$16,518
Far West	$23,755



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What We Earn

- **Name:** Martha Trujillo-Urioste
- **Local Association, state:** Education Support Employees Association of Clark County, Nevada
- **Years of service:** 10
- **Current pay:** $13.61 an hour, 40 hours a week for 11 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** A '95 Buick Skylark.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Not being able to make my car insurance payment.
- **Best part of the job:** About 75 percent of the parents at my school are non-English speaking. It's a joy because I get to practice my language a lot, and it's great to be of service to the Hispanic community.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** I'd like to cut the paperwork burden in half. For instance, when you make a mistake in payroll, you have to type a variance and a memo and they both go the same person in the main payroll office. Why not just do the memo?
- **Dream job:** I'd like to work more with computers. Specifically, I'd like to get more training in different word processing methods.
- **I think I'm worth:** A million bucks—but I'd settle for $100,000.

PAYROLL CLERKS

National Average Salary, 1995-96 ..... $25,009
National Average Salary, 1994-95 ..... $24,042
Percent Salary Increase 4.0%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

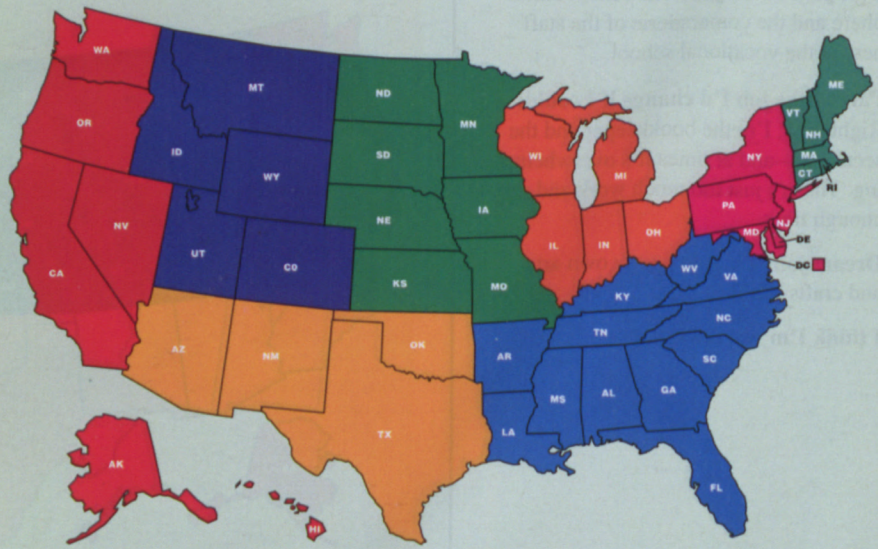
300 to 2,499	$24,958
2,500 to 9,999	$25,845
10,000 to 24,999	$24,349
25,000 or more	$23,848

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$23,935
$4,500 to $4,999	$23,931
$5,000 to $5,999	$24,346
$6,000 to $6,999	$24,962
$7,000 or more	$27,585

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$27,103
Mideast	$26,865
Southeast	$23,491
Great Lakes	$25,846
Plains	$22,671
Southwest	$20,823
Rocky Mountains	$21,803
Far West	$27,618



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What We Earn

- **Name:** Sue Hulbert
- **Local Association, state:** Association of Greece Central Education Personnel, New York
- **Years of service:** 16
- **Current pay:** $18,000 for 11 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** A new furnace and central air conditioning for my house.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Will I have enough money when I retire to go south in the winter and play golf? Seriously, will I have enough to take care of illness or whatever else may come up?
- **Best part of the job:** Helping the students with their transcripts and schedules—it's very rewarding.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** There's a lot of pressure in this job—and not enough money for the work that I do. The district doesn't pay any of us support employees what we're really worth.
- **Dream job:** I would love to be a vacation guide, organizing people's trips and planning itineraries.
- **I think I'm worth:** $25,000.

CLERK-TYPISTS

National Average Salary, 1995-96 . . . . . $19,447
National Average Salary, 1994-95 . . . . . $18,674
Percent Salary Increase 4.1%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

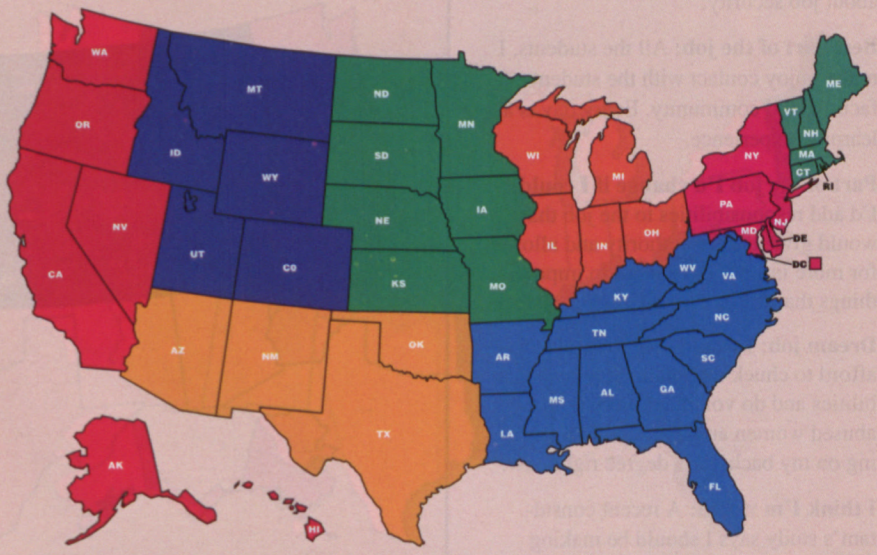
300 to 2,499	$17,972
2,500 to 9,999	$19,781
10,000 to 24,999	$19,560
25,000 or more	$19,530

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$19,139
$4,500 to $4,999	$18,503
$5,000 to $5,999	$18,101
$6,000 to $6,999	$19,096
$7,000 or more	$21,957

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$22,430
Mideast	$20,754
Southeast	$18,251
Great Lakes	$18,690
Plains	$17,981
Southwest	$16,834
Rocky Mountains	$17,082
Far West	$21,714



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What We Earn

- **Name:** Linda Adams
- **Local Association, state:** West Virginia University Association of Concerned Employees, West Virginia
- **Years of service:** 8
- **Current pay:** $16,596 for 12 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** An '89 Escort.
- **Biggest financial worry:** Downsizing at the University. I think most people in higher education need to be concerned about job security.
- **Best part of the job:** All the students. I really enjoy contact with the students, faculty, and community. Every day is a learning experience.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** I'd add responsibilities to the job that would give it more authority and allow for more input. I have ideas to improve things that I'd like to see given a chance.
- **Dream job:** I would love to be able to afford to chuck the job and the responsibilities and do volunteer work with abused women and children. I'm working on my bachelor's degree right now.
- **I think I'm worth:** A recent consultant's study says I should be making $23,712.

LIBRARY CLERKS

National Average Salary, 1995-96 ..... $14,791
National Average Salary, 1994-95 ..... $14,381
Percent Salary Increase 2.9%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

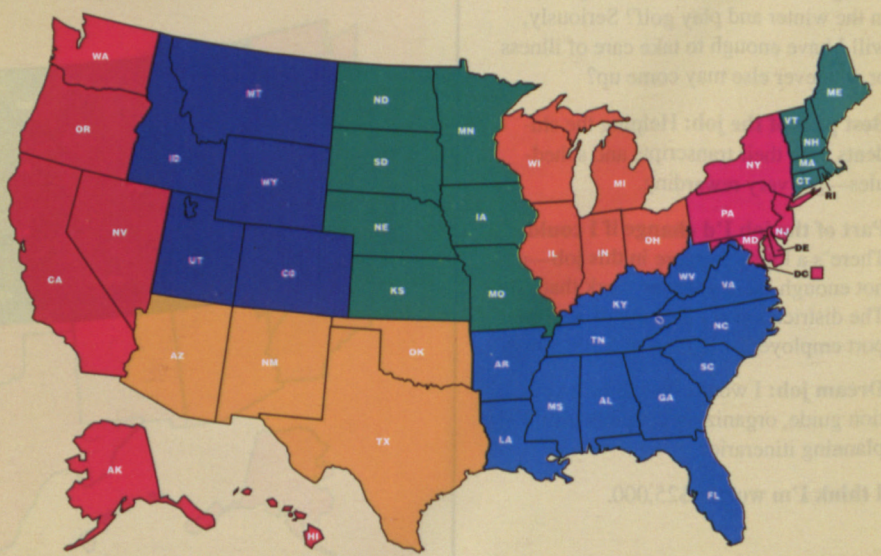
300 to 2,499	$13,654
2,500 to 9,999	$14,642
10,000 to 24,999	$15,474
25,000 or more	$15,724

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$14,607
$4,500 to $4,999	$13,880
$5,000 to $5,999	$12,982
$6,000 to $6,999	$15,052
$7,000 or more	$17,301

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$13,901
Mideast	$16,849
Southeast	$13,407
Great Lakes	$14,241
Plains	$12,519
Southwest	$12,381
Rocky Mountains	$12,748
Far West	$18,799



All figures taken from the *National Survey of Salaries and Wages in Public School, Part 3, Wages and Salaries Paid Support Personnel in Public Schools, 1995-96.* © 1996 by Educational Research Service. Hourly wage rates and salaries presented as national averages reflect nonweighted averages of the approximately 1,000 districts that provide data reported to ERS. Appreciation is expressed to ERS for use of these data.

What We Earn

- **Name:** Bessie Woods
- **Local Association, state:** Pulaski Association of Support Staff, Arkansas
- **Years of service:** 6
- **Current pay:** $8 an hour, 37.5 hours a week for 10 months
- **Most recent major purchase:** I recently had three rooms added to my house.
- **Biggest financial worry:** My husband will buy a car that I can't pay for.
- **Best part of the job:** I love helping my colleagues by serving as their union rep. I like recruiting members, traveling to new places, meeting new people—and most of all, I like getting what we want.
- **Part of the job I'd change if I could:** I would make sure all of us were called professional educators—not teachers and paras. I'd make sure there were no more big I's and little you's.
- **Dream job:** To open a nice, homey facility for troubled children of all ages and colors who don't have homes.
- **I think I'm worth:** At least $15,000 to $20,000 a year.

NONINSTRUCTIONAL ASSISTANTS

National Average Hourly Wage, 1995-96 ..... $8.52
National Average Hourly Wage, 1994-95 ..... $8.29
Percent Salary Increase 2.8%

Pay by Size of Student Enrollment

300 to 2,499	$8.05
2,500 to 9,999	$8.43
10,000 to 24,999	$9.08
25,000 or more	$8.73

Pay by Per Pupil Expenditure

Less than $4,500	$7.95
$4,500 to $4,999	$8.00
$5,000 to $5,999	$8.35
$6,000 to $6,999	$8.44
$7,000 or more	$9.27

Pay by Geographic Region

New England	$9.27
Mideast	$8.91
Southeast	$8.55
Great Lakes	$8.54
Plains	$7.56
Southwest	$7.87
Rocky Mountains	$7.42
Far West	$9.16

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Heads UP!

Where there's a will, your Association is committed to helping you find the way. The following resources are available to help.

■ Providing Safe Health Care: The Role of Educational Support Personnel

This handbook outlines your rights and responsibilities when you're working with special needs students. Single copies available free, while supplies last, from the NEA Office of Educational Support Personnel (address below). Additional copies may be purchased from the NEA Professional Library (800/229-4200) for $4.95 plus s&h.

■ Legal Actions Against Educational Support Personnel. Who Pays?

NEA's Educators Employment Liability program protects you from personal financial liability stemming from employment-related lawsuits. This brochure explains your benefits and tells you what to do if an incident occurs. Call your local affiliate for a copy.

■ Contracting Out: Strategies for Fighting Back

When the subcontractor comes knocking at your door, be prepared. This handbook provides evidence that privatization is no quick fix. Get the facts—learn how to prevent contracting out. Call your local affiliate for a copy. Ask for a copy of *Corporate Profiles* if you need the facts on a specific company—or look to NEA Online (see page 44 for details).

■ Appropriate Inclusion and Paraprofessionals: Changing Roles and Expectations

This booklet is a resource for paraprofessionals in schools that mix regular and special education students in the same classrooms. Learn how to adapt to changing roles and adopt strategies that will help you help others. Call your local affiliate for a copy.

Providing Safe Health Care: The Role of Educational Support Personnel
Who Pays?
Contracting Out:
Strategies For Fighting Back
nea
Appropriate Inclusion and Paraprofessionals: Changing Roles and Expectations

■ Paraprofessionals in the Education Workforce

A complete guide to career and training opportunities for paraprofessionals—from information about licensing to state and local contacts. Call your local affiliate for a copy.

■ National Education Support Personnel Membership Study

NEA Research takes a statistical look at ESP members. This comprehensive booklet covers everything from hours of work to working conditions. Call your local affiliate for a copy.

■ Drug and Alcohol Testing for Bus Drivers

On January 1, 1995, Federal drug and alcohol regulations went into effect. This videotape shows how the new regulations affect you and your job. Call your state affiliate for a copy.

■ NEA Member Benefits: Education Support Personnel

Need a credit card, discount on a car rental, or affordable homeowner's insurance? This brochure explains how you can get them—and more—through NEA Member Benefits. Call your local affiliate for a copy. Or call 800/637-4636 for details.

For more information on any of these resources, contact:

NEA
Office of Educational Support Personnel
1201 16th St., N.W.,
Washington, DC 20036

202/822-7131

NEA Support Staff Membership

* As of April 30, 1996
Source: NEA Membership Records

Look to NEA Member Benefits for outstanding value and service.

"As retirees, we thought getting life insurance would be difficult but the NEA Guaranteed Issue Life Plan made it easy."

"The NEA Credit Card, with no annual fee and a low interest rate, saves us money month after month."

NEA Member Benefits

responds to your needs

"Thanks to our NEA-Sponsored Money Market Account we were able to make the most valuable investment of them all."

"Planning for my retirement was easy with the NEA Valuebuilder Annuity."

"I can rest a little easier with the affordable protection that the NEA Term Life Insurance Plan provides me and my family."

Our Pledge to You

NEA Member Benefits offers quality products in a competitive nationwide market with broad accessibility to the NEA membership ... supported by superior service, a consumer education program designed to help members be better consumers of financial, investment, insurance, and other products, and a process to resolve consumer concerns fairly.

NEA Member Benefits Mission Statement

Just call **1-800-637-4636** and one of our helpful Member Service Representatives can send you information or answer your questions. (Monday-Friday 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.; Saturday 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. ET).

nea Member Benefits

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